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FERN S

HENRY MILNER



Rideout

NB



**FERN SEED**

10

**BOOKS BY  
HENRY M. RIDEOUT**

**FERN SEED  
THE FOOT-PATH WAY  
TIN COWRIE DASS  
THE FAR CRY  
KEY OF THE FIELDS  
*and* BOLDERO  
THE SIAMESE CAT  
WHITE TIGER**

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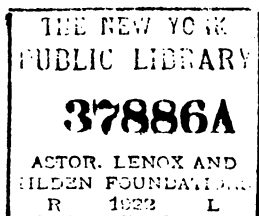
**WILLIAM JONES**

# FERN SEED

By  
HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT



NEW YORK  
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY  
1921



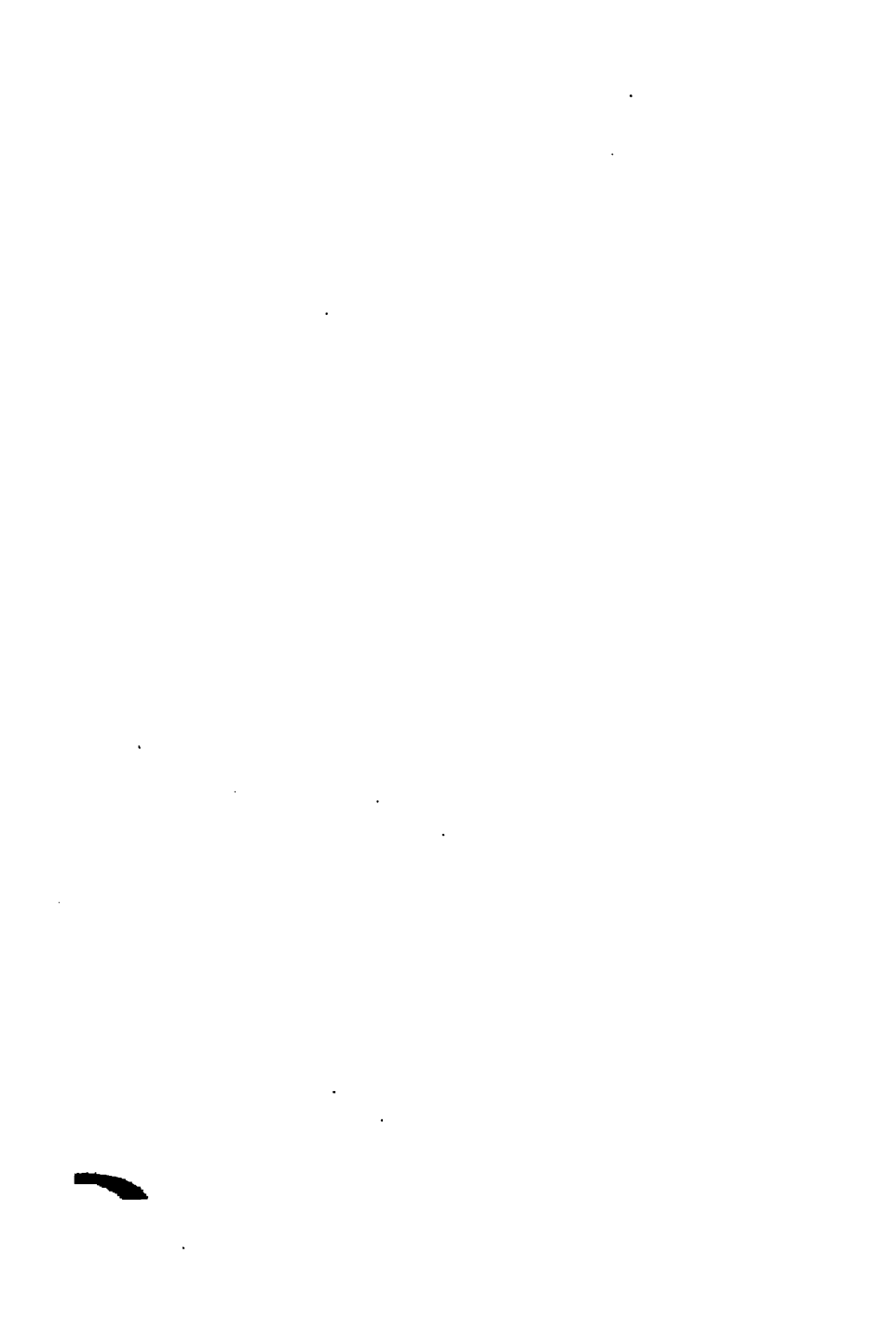
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DEAR PARSON:—

For a lover of great books, you have always shown remarkable indulgence toward little ones. This, therefore, is dedicated to you. If you detect any wildnesses in it, please blame them on the gentleman who told corrupting tales of how the devil flew over Boston Stump. And please let it remind you of evenings beside the fire, and of a friend among so many others of yours in more than one land, more than one generation.

H. M. R.



# **FERN SEED**



# FERN SEED

## I

AFTERNOON sun beat down on the quays of Alexandria, making the air boil and dance along stone-work, above dock water, among masts and funnels. A crowd waiting under the sun found it hot. Leonard Corsant, after some years in the Far East, cared little for this heat of Egypt; he had known worse; but now he felt impatient to go aboard, get out into good sea breeze once more, and continue his journey. He was going home to America.

Through her window in the little sentry-box office, a girl passed him his papers, and smiled. She was dark, pretty, and much more his friend than the occasion demanded.

"Again, sir! Ah, we always lose you!" she mourned, in excellent French.

Leonard returned her smile, as he took her pen. He had a good-humored face, sunburnt, careless,

with a hawk nose of rather determined cut and easy bright blue eyes; lifting his hat, he bared a crop-head of close fair curls. He was no ladies' man, to speak of; they did not bother him often; and while he read her printed slip he thought this one must be of those who reveal tenderness when a ship casts off or a train rolls out. They were not in his line of life.

"Yes, thank you, but see here, mademoiselle," he objected, "I can't sign."

There was plague in Alexandria. The officers of public health were anxious. Their paper which the girl had given him, said, in French:

"I declare upon my honor as a gentleman that I have no soiled linen in my baggages."

She looked at him coyly through the grating.

"Oh, it is a form, sir."

"Yes, but I can't sign your form," said Leonard. "I have some in my baggages. A shirt and so on, after bathing just now. Pardon. But this holy document raises a point of honor."

The girl laughed, snatched it from his hand, snatched the pen also, and wrote.

"There. I have signed," she cried. "On my head be all the perjury."

Leonard seldom forgot a face, and hers was too pretty to be forgotten; he had never seen

her before; yet the name she wrote, blotted, and held up gaily for approval, was correct.

"L. Corsant."

The signature might almost have been his own; and beneath it she had drawn a paraph that no one could have guessed,—a flourish which as a little boy he had copied from his father's writing. A pot-hook run through a bull's-head, his father called it: a family joke, meaningless. He stared at this copy, then at her.

"How on earth did you know?"

She laughed again.

"Oh, monsieur, how should I forget? You are not in the vein of compliment this afternoon. But me, I will say *you* look much better and more brown. Now go, please. I am busy. You pretend I forget you, when you always block the way standing on your punctilio."

The dark young minx waved him farewell, and rolled her eyes with a look of the sort called ravishing. Leonard passed on. The queue of sweating Europeans behind him—Holy Land tourists, who wore mosquito veils draped voluptuously round ferocious helmets—began in fact to grumble, push, and use unholy outlandish words.

"Well, at last!" he thought, following his porters up the Rubattino gangway. "There's an

Egyptian mystery for you, black magic. It's come too late, of course."

He soon forgot this riddle. A very fat Italian woman, dressed magnificently, helped him to forget, by waving her farewells to someone on board, and falling between quay and ship. Blue-gowned Arabs calmly hauled her out with ropes,—one yelling mass of rage and terror, crowned with muddy cascades from what had been her Paris bonnet. The poor lady became a source of artless glee. Crew and longshoremen cast off merrily. Veiled pilgrims from the Holy Land were still enjoying the memory of her misfortune, and chuckling, long after Pharos and Pharallon had sunk in the horizon.

Leonard found the voyage a disappointment. After the hot, dreamy azure of the Red Sea, Mediterranean water seemed dark, bleak, and chilly. Across this old route of the Roman grainships came biting winds, like those loosed on the Trojan fleet,—his former schoolbook enemies, Eurus, Notus, Africus all together, more fresh air than he had bargained for. Aquilo or something worse blew from the Adriatic mouth, when all hands took to the smoking-room and shivered. Below in the doctor's cabin he enjoyed the company of a third-class passenger, an old Nestorian

monk, whom he treated to Gragnano and Flor de Dindigul, and who treated him to many hours of profitable talk.

Naples drew near from the sea one morning early as a cold amphitheatre of whited villas. Its welcome took the form of a printed order, distributed with care by men in uniform, commanding every stranger to report himself daily for ten days.

"I haven't any plague," said Corsant. "Be hanged if they keep me down here to freeze."

His friend the monk smiled.

"Your blood has grown thin in the tropics. Not so thin as mine. *Hélas, beaux jours perdus!*—Go then, my boy, in God's name. But do not leave them your next address."

Leonard took this good counsel, carried the old man off for forty-eight hours of happy mooning through Pompeii, shook hands, parted, and climbed into a north-bound train. He was now quite alone in the world, with time to waste and nothing to do.

During some years of hard work, he had cherished the dream of another Italian holiday; but now that it came true, he found the thing less free and glorious than what his fancy had painted. Moving from one set of obscure lodgings to an-

other—to make his money go as far as possible—he learned that bed was the only warm place, for him, in Italy. But then, fleas loved this haven also. Thanks to a Chinese boy in Hong Kong, Leonard's only great coat was travelling round by sea to London. He made light of such trifles, and persevered; yet even his long walks by day, pilgrimages on foot to the most lovely sights, became little by little overcast and saddened. He had too much of his own company, was always cold.

One evening in Santa Maria Novella he sat as long as he could sit with a dark, hushed, humped little crowd, looking out from mysterious gloom to where the altar floated in a haze of candlelight and of young voices singing. The contrast moved him, touched him within like an allegory of our poor human-kind. He would have stayed there; but the mortal chill of the church had crept into his bones, and drove him away. As he went quietly out, through the vast empty rear of the darkness, a man, a shadow leaning on a pillar, turned to look at him. Leonard caught only a passing impression that the movement was quick and stiff. He thought no more of it.

"Well? To bed with the fleas again?" he asked himself, outdoors. "No, by gum. This is bad. A real go of the waggles!"

His body shook, his teeth chattered. Slapping himself like a teamster, he crossed the piazza by starlight, and hurried down a narrow street, to find some refuge, osteria, trattoria, wine-shop or eating-den, whatever might first appear. For some time he found nothing. The way was empty, dark, a rift among mediaeval shadows. When at last a pair of windows gave light, ahead, their panes all steamy with warmth inside, he turned toward them, opened the door between, and entered.

It was a dingy little old restaurant, a narrow room which in those days before the war ran through cat-a-corner from Sword Street to Sun Street. A dingy little old waiter leaned against the wall as though put there and abandoned like a worn-out umbrella. If alive, he was the only living creature to be seen. Leonard had chosen a table nearest the source of heat—a cavern-mouth that breathed out greasy kitchen odors—and had settled himself on a bench, before the old solitary moved or so much as blinked.

"Good evening," said Leonard. "Something hot, if you please."

The waiter slowly detached his back from the wall, and came forward mumbling excuses:

"The cook has gone home in rage, sir. A maledicted cook, who made asseverations . . ."

Then, as he became aware that his guest sat shuddering, his aged eyes grew bright, shrewd, kindly. He stopped his apology, to cry one compassionate word: "*Freddo!*"

With that he darted into the kitchen, made a great clatter, and quickly burst again from the darkness, running with a tumbler, a black bottle, and a copper kettle that steamed.

"Prompt and intelligent cuss," quoth Leonard. In more polite phrases, he begged the man to get another tumbler and share his toddy.

"Oh, sir, you are too kind," was the reply. "I could not think of doing so."

The poor old chap was both surprised and frightened. Leonard had an easy way with him, however, and soon the pair were hobnobbing over Gorgonzola *verde* and a good round loaf of bread. Chills vanished, likewise formality. The talk passed from weather and hard times to politics, then to warfare and memories; for this dried little ancient with his nut-cracker face and beady eyes, had tramped as a boy soldier of Garibaldi's, and plainly a good one. With all the shop to themselves, they took their ease, found each other excellent company, and held a humble revel.

"You like that story, sir?"

"I do, I do!" cried Corsant, leaning back and wiping his eyes. "But it hurts to laugh so."

"Then, sir, I will tell you a yet more comical. At Orte were three sisters . . ."

Just then the Sword Street door quietly opened. A man came in.

The laughing veteran sprang up, drew away, and as though by a trick on the stage, faded shrivelling back into a sad old waiter.

He who caused this transformation paid it no heed, but stepped down into the room and looked about scornfully. He was a lusty blond young man, handsome after a fashion which, thought Leonard, was too professionally male. His English clothes fitted him too well, tighter than need be, and set off a muscular body powerful enough for an athlete's, but not loose enough.

"Good evening to you," he said in English.

Leonard returned the wish.

The stranger paused by Leonard's table. He was smiling, but his eyes remained too pale and cold.

"We always meet in odd places, don't we?" He spoke affably. His bass voice came from the throat and seemed to roughen it. "I shouldn't quite think you'd care for this, though. There are plenty of good beer-halls."

Corsant, when ruffled, had a sleepy way of looking at you. When angry—as a friend of his expressed it—his face died. Now he looked no more than sleepy.

"It does well enough, thanks," he said. "I can't recall any other places where we had the pleasure?"

"Oh, just as you like." The stranger laughed. Then, having turned to see that the servant was beyond ear-shot, he laughed again, and bent across the table. "I do not scrape friendship. But we're off duty, eh? One good turn deserves another, and I thought you might like to know that they are after you."

Leonard had forgotten all plagues of Egypt and all quarantine documents. Now he remembered. This warning seemed freely enough given, and probably true; still he did not like the giver, or the accompanying sneer of condescension.

"Oh. Much obliged," said he. "Let 'em come."

The light-colored eyes flashed down at him balefully.

"Good. We are even. I leave you to—your friend."

Removing his hat stiffly, the man swung round, marched rather than walked past the waiter—

whom he ignored as from a height—and so went out by the other door into the darkness of Sun Street.

“Who was he, Gino?”

The waiter thawed, became human again, and flung off a most inimitable farewell with his hands.

“Ah, that brute! Ah, that white-eyed vassal! I never saw him before, sir.”

“Nor I,” said Leonard.

He was not so sure; that stiff wheel, and turn of the back all in a piece, reminded him how someone had watched him go out of church.

“For all his garments and his altitude,” said Gino, grinning, “he behaved as one in a hurry. No repose. Why fluster so grandly? Why should one hurry, sir? The man cannot consume the time, no: the time consumes the man.”

Corsant agreed.

“You speak like Horatius Flaccus. Have we any more hot water? If so, the evening is young.—Come, sit down, and let us finish that yarn of the Three Sisters.”

## II

BEING a young man who took things as they happened, and like John Silver "kept company very easy," Leonard soon forgot these adventures in travel. Nothing came of them, except a long illness after his chill. He spent some weeks abed in France—dreary weeks, exceeding lonesome—and reached England later as a pale, thin convalescent, hollow about the eyes and tottery on the legs.

To get well, he made straight for the country. More than once in childhood his father had told him if ever he should visit England, he must go search out a little old village near the sea.

"Our people came from there, or close by," his father had said. "We'll have to see the Devil's Nose together, and pass through it for luck, my boy. We need to freshen ours. A couple of centuries gone, I daresay, since one of us did it. Some day we'll go there on pilgrimage."

These dark sayings took a child's fancy at the

moment, lay in the same storeroom with other memories, bits of old tales, fairy books, things imagined, or facts mysterious because half understood, and so to the young man had sometimes a trace of their faded color and fragrance. Leonard had made of his father a legendary hero, powerful, gentle, with dark blue twinkling eyes,—a form surrounded by the bright mist of early adoration. They two had never gone on any pilgrimage. But as a grown man, without living kindred, he had once or twice vaguely meant to do, some day, what his father proposed; if only as a pagan rite, the pleasing of a shade. Always before in England he had been kept too busy.

"A sick man," he thought, "has no right to bother his friends. So now's a good time. The little old place, whatever it's like, duller the better, will do for 'loungin' round and sufferin'.' The inn is called Merle's, I see. Wire for a room, and ask to be met. We'll go down; as father said, for luck."

He went, therefore, alone. The month was May, the journey an afternoon dream of green fields gliding past, lovely to a sick man's eyes, and to his mind one drowsy comfort that promised the return of health. Towards evening, at a tiny station under a hawthorn hedge, he stepped from

his compartment into a brisk yet mild air smelling of green grass and the sea, and a light that spread as from vast distances unconfined yet softly tempered and brooding.

An old man peered at his face, nodded without a word, and taking his kit-bag, led him behind the hedge, where stood a shaggy moorlandish pony in a cart. Leonard climbed slowly to a seat; the old man hopped up nimbly; the pony jumped and started off trotting with wild and fitful ardor.

Up-hill, down-hill, by roads or lanes always deep-sunken between hedge-banks, they jogged rattling. Now and again, side-wise through the gate of a field, or forward from some height, Corsant caught brief glimpses of the landscape: rolling hills all patchworked in great squares, rich green, pale green, bright red, and where young wheat had but started, faint rose-and-green as changeable as taffeta. But chiefly the way wound along in secret, hidden by wild-flower banks and hedges, a dusky tunnel under the trees.

In one of its darkest hollows, the driver halted his pony.

He said nothing, but sat and waited. Corsant did the same. A minute or two passed thus.

On their right hand, the tangle of thorns and beech was broken: two stone pillars, with chains

hanging between them, stood in a gap, through which Leonard saw garden borders, shrubs, and deeper within, half hidden, the windows of a dark stone house. The place seemed empty and neglected. Red valerian ran wild there.

"Well?" said he at last.

Turning, he caught the driver's eye for the first time, and only for an instant. There was an odd look in it: something like respect, sympathy even, mixed with shrewd understanding.

"Why, sir," replied the old man. "The chains are locked, sir."

"Oh? Is this the inn?"

A quick side-glance, that began to be a stare, was the driver's answer. Then he corrected himself, and sat as before, watching the pony's ears.

"You wish to go to the inn first, then, sir?"

"Yes, of course."

"Beg pardon, sir." The man gathered his reins, and drove on. "I misunderstood, sir."

They jogged in silence down a hill and up another, turned left at a cross-road, turned right where many lanes met, and so went twisting through a green labyrinth where twilight fell. At last, about lamp-lighting time, they descended a short curving street lined with thatched cottages,

in the lower end of which their pony halted without command. Here the driver hopped out, unloaded Corsant's bag, and guided him through the gate of a small garden to a lighted doorway.

Inside the house, a stout old woman carrying a lamp greeted him kindly.

"Good evening, sir." Her voice was pleasant, her florid face all a broad smile of welcome. While she added some speech about dinner and bed, an aged white bull-terrier coasted round her skirts, approached in purblind fashion, and sniffed the stranger's legs.

Afterward, at table, she stood beaming covertly on him as he ate.

"I'm sorry my husband made that blunder, sir," she said. "It was a pity to take you out of your way; but he thought you might wish to . . . " She stopped, then changing and picking her words carefully, concluded:—"might care to look about you a bit."

Being drowsy and tired, Corsant answered at random.

"Oh, it's all right, Mrs. Merle." He stifled a yawn. "An excellent dinner. I foresee this house of yours is the place for a man to get well in."

"I hope so indeed, for you, sir," she replied heartily. "I do indeed, I assure you."

They were very friendly persons, he thought. Going upstairs early, he found his groom of the pony was now groom of the chamber, for by pleasant candle and hearth light, old Merle, with a brass warming-pan, stood caressing the sheets in a vast Pickwickian bed. This ancient seemed as wiry and nimble, but silent, indoors as out. To a mild question if the room needed so much stoking, he listened firmly, replied in brief: the night air was poison, sir; and so took his leave, with respectful wishes. "'The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,'" thought Leonard; but he waited till the old man went downstairs before hauling the fire apart and opening his windows. For a while he lay watching the stars through a frame of dark leaves and vines; then, to the hushing voice of the sea behind some hill, and the squeak of a churn-owl weaving nocturnal spells round and round the house, he fell asleep greatly contented and at home.

The weeks that followed made his content all the deeper. When rain lashed the windows, and the elms tossed, and hidden seas rumbled in the distance, he lounged by the little parlor fire, reading, smoking, dozing like the Fat Boy of Dingley

Dell; while the old white bull-terrier snored on the hearth, a coffin of a clock ticked solemnly, blinking its brazen eye at him, and a bullfinch in the kitchen piped a few notes, forlornly sweet, during the pauses of the wind. He was the one guest there, alone like a single passenger at sea. Mrs. Merle and her husband he seldom encountered, for they not only took care that no one else disturbed him, but kept themselves remarkably out of the way. In fine weather—it soon turned fine—he went outdoors so early and returned so late that of the village people he saw, as it happened, little or nothing but a face here and there at a window. His first walks led him toward the sea, along high cliffs, to lie sheltered by the dark spines and gold of gorse, and from a green precipice edge to look down on sparkling water, headlands that slanted away each to its “parson and clerk” pair of outermost crags, and far-curved surf, white streaks that seemed motionless in the distance. Mild air soothed and healed, the sun tanned him like an Indian.

A fortnight of this life saw him well. He began to scour the country, taking walks that grew longer and longer, setting out at sunrise, returning at dusk, with a stride that never tired any more,

a giant appetite for Mrs. Merle's gooseberries and clotted cream.

One noonday, being far afield, both hungry and thirsty, he entered a quiet little town which sweltered at the bottom of a valley. Its thoroughfare was empty and hot. From glaring cobblestones he stepped into the darkness of an old coaching inn, the White Hart. Here a dismal waiter brought him cold veal pie, strong beer, sweating cheese, and angrily green gherkins.

"Haven't you any . . . lighter trifle?" asked Leonard.

The man struggled with his grief awhile.

"I'll ascertain, sir," he replied without hope. "It's not likely, but cook *might* have made trifle."

"Good Lord, no!" said Corsant in haste. "These will do very well."

In that close heat, they were formidable. He made the best of it, however, and attacked them with care. The room was cool, though mouldy. He ate alone, but through a glazed partition could look into the aged coffee-room, where two persons sat talking. One was a tall, black-haired man with a bass voice; the other, hidden by his broad shoulders, a girl.

"No, miss, that colt was a chestnut . . . You're thinking of the brown filly . . . No, an-

other trace altogether . . . At Newbury in the eighties, before you were born . . . ”

“Why, George, what are you saying?” came the girl’s voice. “It’s not often one catches you in the wrong.”

“Not on that point, thank you, miss,” replied the bass, quietly stubborn. “Now, go back as far as Ormonde’s year . . . ”

The girl interrupted again. Leonard caught only a few of their words, but knew that they were discussing horses, and gathered that the girl upheld her end of the argument. Some wild country tomboy, he thought; a type which he had seen before, and disliked: loafing in a dingy bar, smoking with men, talking slang, airing her worldliness.

Presently the man laughed at something, and leaned back. Over his shoulder, the girl’s face appeared, smiling. It was not at all the face of a tomboy: mischievous indeed and young, but even in that shadowy den, alight with intelligence. Her eyes, large and black, were looking straight in through the dusty window-pane.

“Why! There——”

She sprang up from her chair, and stood for an instant leaning forward, her face wonderfully brightened, her lips (Corsant had time to mark

what a clear red they were) parted in surprise. Next moment she had sat down, hidden again behind her companion.

"That was extraordinary! For half a second, you know, I thought . . . "

The rest Corsant did not hear. But the man, who had neither turned nor moved, except to glance up at her, presently replied:

"No. He won't be here for another week, miss. I'll try to have everything ready as you'd like it."

"It is now, George. You're quite splendid," said the girl's voice. "I was and am delighted."

Soon afterward, through the glass, Leonard saw them rise and go, the tall man following her with unstudied though evident respect. She herself was fairly tall; both were slender; and in their easy, outdoor way of moving they seemed vaguely alike. When they had vanished, a clack of hoofs and rattle of wheels on cobbles passed down the street and left it sleeping.

Leonard continued to stun his appetite with the cold leaden pasty and discolored cheese. They seemed worse than before.

"Wonder who she thought I was?" He mused at the dingy window-panes, as if behind them something of her brightness lingered. "Shouldn't mind being the right chap."

That afternoon he walked some fifteen miles more, homeward roundabout. He went slowly, for the green sunken lanes held much heat and little stir of air; but their hedgerow banks imprisoned the sight only to enrich it. Wild flowers—campion, violets, snitchwort, herb robert—filled the grass and lined both sides of the road higher than a man's head. On a hilltop he paused, to catch the draught of soft sea breeze and hear a pair of skylarks.

"She was mighty pretty," he thought; and becoming aware that he thought so, was surprised at his own irrelevance. "What! Running in my head, is she? What for?"

He went on down hill. These walks began to be tiresome.

In the Pickwickian bedroom at Mrs. Merle's that evening, he found his wash had come home again. Once before the wrapping had been written on: "For Lieutenant Corsant"; now the inscription ran—"For Captain Corsant," and under the twine someone had stuck a nosegay of wall-flowers.

"Going up in the world," thought Leonard. "If promotion keeps on, they'll have me the 'very pattern of a modern Major-General.' "

He put the wall-flowers in a glass of water, and stood enjoying their fragrance.

"Mighty pretty," said he. "As good in profile as she was full front."

### III

CURVED gables of tawny-gray thatch across the street, tree-tops behind them where rooks fluttered and cawed, shut off all view of the river. To see it, the nearest way led through a lane past the blacksmith's. A small tidal stream, curving between two broad low hills, it ran deep with the ebb and bent round a crag into the hidden sea; with the flood, it crept up shallow, pale, spreading inland among green wooded points and fields whitened by daisies.

Young flood had set in, grown toward half tide, as Corsant went down the lane.

"Good morning, sir," called Peacock the blacksmith from his cavern. A big, swart man, he grinned, and saluted with his hammer between blows. "Fine day!"

In the darkness an old white pony stood half asleep, with a tool-box under his heels. Perched on the edge of the water tub, a long-legged man sat and played with a rasp, brooded, or thought-

fully gossiped, while Peacock bent a horseshoe, the soft red iron muffling the ring of his anvil.

"A very fine day," said Leonard.

The bitter smell of burnt hoofs drifted after him, in the sunlight and hawthorn shade. A wall crossed the foot of the lane; a stile mounted the wall; and beyond these a path descended green fields to the river. Near the stream Leonard turned and looked back as though someone called. No one had made a sound; but far up hill by the blacksmith's door two small figures stood watching him,—the aproned Peacock and his taller gossip. Though distant, they had somehow the air of men watching long and sharply. It was not Peacock, but the other, who raised one arm overhead and waved a genial flourish.

"Strangers in these parts," thought Leonard, "must be a rare sight."

He answered the flourish, turned, and struck into another footpath which rambled along the river bank. Passing behind a screen of branches, he caught his last glimpse of village and lane. The two little figures remained there still, watching him go out of sight.

"This is a good time," he reflected lazily, "to try father's project. We'll walk through the thirles, and freshen our family luck."

But the sea, when he climbed round its barrier crag at the river mouth, did not favor this plan. The lonely curve of yellow sand was narrowed, as if drawn taut, by incoming tide; a great azure pool, fordable, yet holding infinitely deep reflections of summer cloud, poured smooth across it into the river; and though everywhere alongshore the water line lapped nearer in tiny waves that glittered and sank almost foamless, white-caps were bursting round the rocks beyond. A hundred yards out, black, ugly, pierced by two fantastic arches, towered the Devil's Nose.

"No walking through that for a while."

The dark surf-worn pinnacle stood ringed with spray, which gleamed as it came surging through the two holes, veiled their shadows half-way up, fell, and spouted landward into sunlight again. The rock sneered at this peaceful shore, thought Leonard, like a reminder of evil fury hidden and disguised.

"You might swim through it." Basking on warm sand, he dallied with the notion. "Why not? Rather fun."

No breath of air stirred, but the waves in the thirls maintained a hissing roar, continuous, like winds tearing through a forest. The longer he heard, the less he liked it.

"Well, by Georgel!" He sat up, angry. "Where's your nerve gone? Turning invalidical, eh? We'll see about that!"

The beach was then, as on all his former visits, deserted. He pulled off his clothes, and ran down naked into the sea.

"Here goes for luck."

After his first plunge, the water seemed glorious. He shot forth into a region of fresh life, with body and mind rejoicing, the world growing young to eyesight cleared by sea magic. A good swimmer, Corsant put his power into a few strokes, found it all there again ready at call, and then went romping forward, burying his face for mere wantonness, and staring down through the cool green void where sunshine faded into quivering mist and network shadows. A cold streak suddenly checked this play. He roused, and glanced ahead. It was not a streak: he had left the tempered surface water behind, and now swam in a chill ocean current, near the rock. Green hollows round him began to seethe white.

"Roughening up a bit," he said. "Right. Now we come to the pretty part."

Viewed at close range from sea level, the rock drew aloft, magnified itself, and became wonderfully grim. The splintered spire, jagged from

top to bottom with lumps and crockets; the two wild arches that dripped, yawned, sucked in wave after wave to fling it out like snow and thunder; the base, carved by ages of storm: all these details and the gloomy color gave Corsant a strange uneasiness while he gathered himself for the tussle and steered cautiously into the foam. No wonder this thing bore the devil's name. It resembled the stump of some gothic ruin, some unholy church blasted and driven into the sea.

"Well, Old Man," cried the swimmer, "if this is your belfry, I'm going plumb through like a bat."

It seemed to lurch and rush toward him, roaring an answer. Leonard chose his moment, whirled into the right-hand arch on a retreating slope, was deafened with bestial throaty noises, dove under the next wave, and came up treading water in the sunlight. He caught breath, shook the brine from his eyes, and saw looming above him the seaward front of the rock, uglier than its back. He had performed half his journey; but that swift, violent passage had beaten out of him all the fun, all the high spirits, all desire to boast. He dreaded the return. Those booming, wallowing holes were loathsome.

"Get it over with."

A ridge of surf slapped him across the face, left him blind, choking; and even while he fought for air and light, another ridge heaved him up, coiled round him, and flung him sidelong. As through green glass that suddenly blew up into lather, the central column of the rock rushed by like a prow. It grazed his left side. Then came darkness, a prolonged hissing, the cough and spew of a glutted abyss, in which malignant forces mauled him, churned him round and round; and then a hollow crash, with a flare of soft light inside his head.

"Busted!"

How long he remained half stunned, Corsant never knew. He must have gone on swimming, for he woke to find his limbs in motion, the water still and warm, the shore not far away. Water, sands, hill-tops, and sky reeled in a colorless glare. His skull ached.

"Wah! Sounded like the sea-serpent gargling!"

He crawled up the beach, to lie by his clothes. Forty winks and a sunbath would restore him. As the pain gradually left his head, he dozed and began to smile.

"Wonder what dad would think of that performance?—We've been through, anyhow. First

time in a couple of hundred years. Did our part. Now bring on your good fortune."

Sitting up, no worse but for a lump over one ear, Corsant grinned at the Devil's Nose. It looked quite harmless and romantic, refined by distance. The foam in the thirles murmured like a summer breeze.

"Oh, yes, very sweet, my friend. Playing the *Cathédrale Engloutie*, aren't you? No go, no can do. You're an old Gargling Gargoyle, and a fraud. Now bring on your luck."

While thus engaged with fancies, he became aware that he was not alone on the beach.

To his right near the inward-flowing river, a tall man led a white pony down to wade. They had come from Peacock's, of course: he watched them idly. The man, stooping, bared his feet and rolled his trousers above the knee. Somehow the movements were very smart, very trim.

"Must be a sailor," thought Leonard.

The pony, having no use for sea water, began to fight and cavort. With the same neatness, quick, devoid of effort, his leader had him in belly-deep.

"No. Must be a groom."

Man and beast waded together along the shallows, their figures—black and slender, white and chunky—in sharp relief against rippling sunshine.

Leonard gazed after them dreamily, and when they came ashore, sat watching the reflection of their legs appear and vanish with each wave, now mirrored in a glaze of sky-blue, now lost on dark sand.

He had fallen half asleep, when footsteps trampled near by.

"Well, sir," called a voice, "I see you went withershins!"

It was a deep, rich voice, carrying like a good actor's.

Leonard sat up again—quickly, for it was the same voice that had talked horses with the girl at the White Hart.

"Went where?" he said, blinking.

The tall man stood before him, holding the white pony with one hand, and in the other his boots tied together, crammed full of stockings.

"Withershins. Contrary to the sun." He laughed, and swung his footgear toward the Devil's Nose. "'Twas a sight for sore eyes, that. I said to myself, marking how you swam, 'He remembers the lucky way round of it!' Yes, indeed."

Words, laughter, an ardent shining of his bronze face, declared the man to be supremely happy, jubilant. In his emotion was a queer trait:

namely, that he seemed to regard Leonard as the cause of it all.

"Why, are you bringing me some luck, for a change?"

"Give us half a chance to, sir, and you'd see!" The stranger laughed again. He was very dark, with eyes like a sparrow-hawk's, humorous lips that curved boldly, and a thin, thoroughbred beak of a nose. Barefoot, he stood about six feet two, clean and springy, in old clothes which he wore as trim as a soldier. His face, his whole frame, contained such energy that while waiting there, quiet enough, the man appeared restless, alive with flickering wildfire. "Ted Peacock said it was you, passing his door. I'd heard rumors you were at the inn. Didn't believe 'em till now. You surprised us a bit, didn't you?"

He studied Corsant with a keen and cheerful eye, paused, then added:

"Can't tell how glad I am, sir. It's good to see you so fit; so much better than . . . than we might expect, if you don't mind my speaking out."

Leonard stared up at him.

"Look here, my friend. You're mistaking me for somebody else, I believe."

At this reply, the stranger's face underwent a rapid and curious change. A shock, an alarm,

spread across it, the welcoming glow died instantly, a tinge of pain troubled the eyes. Then, looking grave, he turned to hang his boots in the crook of his elbow and pat the old white pony's neck, with the air of a man tiding over some embarrassment. When he looked round again, he was smiling, but differently.

"Right if you say so." He spoke with a forced heartiness. "I didn't mean to put my oar in."

So saying, the man shortened his grip on the halter, and began to lead his drowsy beast away.

"Wait. Let's clear this up," said Leonard. "Who did you think I was, please?"

The other looked back, and laughed.

"Anybody you like," he answered cheerily, as though humoring a sick person. "I'll stay mum. You can find me at the Ship on Ways, or a word left there will fetch me." He hesitated. "Of course you have your reasons for it, I know. But Lord, sir, other folks could tell at a glance:

"'Corsant o' the thrulle  
Hath lockeys crulle——'

As the old rhyme goes, made, I take it, before the sea drilled the second hole clean through out there. And it's true of all the fair ones.

You'd need to shave your head or buy a wig, and even then——"

He moved off, chuckling.

"How did you know my name?" asked Leonard.

The dark man's face became a study, a droll enigma.

"It was revealed to me in a dream, sir."

With that, he and the pony went up the beach toward the river path.

"What a strange meeting! That fellow looked like—somebody. Who was it? I want to hear the rest of this affair."

Leonard, so thinking, rose to follow the stranger, but sat down again. He remembered that he was naked.

## IV

LATER in the week, a fine sunny morning ramble took him through another hamlet near by. A brook ran past it, under a little old gray stone bridge; the church tower, built of the same stone and weathered to the same aged color, rose from a cluster of cottages; and these, quiet as though deserted, lay snugly in a bower of apple blossoms that brightened the air. Bees hummed. From the pink-tinged clouds of bloom, petals here and there snowed lightly over stone walls into the lane.

Opposite the church, a whitewashed front with tiny windows and low doorway bore a sign proclaiming it to be the Ring of Bells, kept by one R. Grayland.

This, while Corsant paused to smell the apple blossoms, reminded him of something.

"My washerwoman hangs out round here," he thought. "A heavenly neighborhood. Let's pay her a call, and thank her for the wallflowers."

The Ring of Bells, when he had stooped through

its open door, appeared silent. A dark little room contained three or four chairs, a bench, some jugs and bottles behind a counter, and a three-cornered spittoon full of sand. By the window hung an engraving, badly foxed, of some gloomy scene, from Captain Johnson's *Lives of the Pyrats and Highwaymen*. The silence in this room gradually stirred with faint music, as the humming of bees drifted in. Beyond the counter a passageway and a back door stood open, so that Leonard, looking straight through the house, could see the dapple-green shadows of a garden.

He knocked on the counter, and called aloud. No one came or answered. While waiting, however, he heard movements and a voice that muttered as in soliloquy, outside the back door.

Stepping through into the garden, he found there a little old broad-hatted woman.

"Good morning!"

She seemed an odd little creature, wiry and bent like a witch; perhaps deaf, for she did not look up at his greeting. A few bee-hives of the Cheshire pattern stood in rank under a high hedge; the light-green shade of a vast beech covered half the enclosure, mingled with brightness reflected from a neighbor's apple trees; and aloft in the warm, scented air, bees darted to and fro, glinting

like crumbs of brass. A tranquil Tityre Tu kind of atmosphere, thought Corsant, brooded over the place.

"The sweet honey bees, some folk do murder 'em with fire and smoke," grumbled the old woman. "I'd never the heart to do so. My pretties, you won't be smothered here. No, no. They make good honey and good mead; they shall have good kindly care at the Ring o' Bells. 'Tis a bargain, dears."

Maundering thus, she looked about her in a vague, downcast way, as though perplexed by the cares of age. She wore her sleeves rolled above the elbows, and what appeared to be long brown gauntlets.

"They do smell angry." Her dull gaze roamed aloft, passing the young man without heed. "So they do, but let 'em alone and they'll come home to their lady queen, never you fear."

Coming closer, Leonard saw that her gauntlets were of living bees. They covered her hands and forearms with a crust of brown scales. On the brim of her hat—a flapping wreck of straw, some laborer's cast-off headgear—bees crawled or hung in clusters like worn-out trimming.

"They know their Mother Grayland. Yes. Good kindly care."

"I'm sure they do, mother," said Leonard.

The old body gave no sign of hearing, though her eyes wandered over him and came down to study the earth again. They were black eyes, dim, smoky, sunken among the wrinkles of a dark and withered face.

"Some folks do let foul brood come in, the sluts." She brushed from her arms the living scales, plucked them off like currants, and scraped them from her finger-tips into a box on the ground. "Not I, sir. Not here. The dear honey pets, no, never. Their habitations be sweet as babe's breath."

Corsant watched her operations for a while in silence. They were slow, fumbling, but uncannily wise. Of a sudden she startled him by drawing herself quickly up as if waked from a dream.

"Of course you want to try it, sir." And she bobbed away toward the house, beckoning. "Come in, come in."

Over her bent shoulders and the flapping hat still trimmed with bees, he saw, as he followed, that the Ring of Bells had wall-flowers on its roof. They blazed in the sun, a hanging garden upheld by great flags of rock four inches thick.

"Sit down, sir, sit down." In her dusky room, the bee-woman slipped behind her counter and

bent underneath, rummaging and mumbling. "'Tis the best mead only, the old ancient mead, to be sure. None of them can make it like Mother Grayland's. No, sir. A secret. Ah, she's lots of secrets in her crazy head, as they miscall it. Yes, yes. A secret. And the White Ale, too; who remembers the proper ancient grout for the White Ale, sir? Not them who talks most. No, no. But the mead now. Where is it again? Aha, here 'tis. Here it comes forth from hiding."

Something clinked while the voice ran on; then Mrs. Grayland crept into view, holding a bottle and a goblet. She had merely walked past the counter without unbending her back, but this feat made her appear more than ever like a witch, a dark old crone stealing from some cave to administer a philtre.

"Taste that, sir, do now."

Filling the goblet carefully, she placed it by him on the bench, and shuffled away.

"Thanks. To the Ring of Bells, and your good health."

The glass, discolored by age or imperfection, had a purple tinge, so that the mead as Corsant held it between his eye and the window shone like amethyst. He took a sip. It was cool, sweet, very mild. He took a pull, and praised it.

"Delicious, mother. Refreshing on such a warm day."

The woman perched on a stool before her shelves doubled over a gloomy sibyl.

"Any day," she muttered. "Warm or cold. Gentlemen do say 'tis heady."

Corsant lighted a cigarette, and while smoking and resting, drained his goblet. The room seemed very cool and comfortable, quite home-like, as Pickwickian as his bed-chamber at the inn. It had really been hot outside. He felt sorry for this old creature, and must do something benevolent.

"The sample was good. Let me try another, Mrs. Grayland."

She came round the counter again, refilled his goblet, and went back to her perch.

"They say 'tis heady," she repeated.

Leonard smiled. This mead was pleasant, nothing more, and his head fairly hard. Her warning somehow called up a droll memory: how Saint Louis gave a temperance lecture to the Sieur de Joinville, Seneschal of Champagne, and how that valiant worthy boasted of a large head and a cold stomach, not to be overcome. It seemed far-fetched, this bit of the past. He sat wondering why such a thing had drifted through his mind, when suddenly the humor of it surprised

him into laughing. At the same moment, he felt a genial, insidious glow within.

"The combs I take, and put to them water from Tobler's Well," droned his hostess, discoursing at vacancy under her hat. "Good fair water, with rose leaves, a little brandy, and cinnamont, and secret arts. It comes out sack mead, sir, of the best."

Her words ran on, endless and inconsequent, like the humming of her bees in the garden. This little room had grown too comfortable, too cozy altogether.

"By George, she was right!" thought Leonard. "The sly old drink, it has a wicked recoil."

He had better do his errand, and get out into fresh air. Pondering over this inspiration, very sagely, he roused with an effort.

"Mrs. Merle, at the inn, said my laundress lived hereabout. Do you know her? She sent me some beautiful wall-flowers,—like yours on the roof."

He rose, and stood waiting for an answer. It did not come. To his amazement, the old woman slowly turned, climbed down to the floor, and leaning across her counter, peered at him, her eyes wild and sharp as a bird's, her face no longer

blank, but crafty, writhing with an almost terrified doubt.

"Is it a dream, sir?" she whispered.

Leonard stared at the transformation.

"I begin to think so," he replied; with truth, for her mead now worked in earnest, turning the whole scene merry and unreal.

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Gripping the woodwork like a bat, she craned forward to search his face.

"You're never young Mr. Corsant!"

He laughed.

"Yes, that's my name."

"The Lord be good to us!" she cried in a fright; and letting go her hold, shrank backward as though to run from the room. "It is!"

"Why? What of that?" said her visitor.

She remained speechless again, watching him narrowly, edging toward the passageway. But as Leonard—unmoved, quite benevolent in fact, and rather dizzy—gave no sign that he should try to corner her, she gradually took heart.

"You've been abroad, sir?" she ventured, in a coaxing whine.

"More or less," he agreed, smiling.

"And come here, and bear me no grudge?"

Uncertain that he caught the words right, Leonard was puzzled.

"Grudge? What? None in the world, mother. Not a bit. Why should I?"

The landlady of the Ring of Bells fixed him with a long stare, then kneading her hands together, began to smile darkly.

"Why should he? Hark!" she mumbled. Her smile had the cunning of dotage, and yet other qualities crept into it: something shrewd, something bitter and regretful, something kindly. "Hark to the grand nature. They all do keep it. Free-handed, all, open-hearted. Why should he, the poor lamb!"

She made a step forward, paused, began some awkward gesture of appeal, broke it off, and stood hesitating. Under the absurd wreck of a hat, her withered face drew into the oddest puckers, and the gleam of her eyes appeared to change. For a moment Leonard thought this queer old body was pitying him.

"I can't bear to think of it!" she cried, and turning suddenly, hobbled away down the passage. "Why shouldn't he, more like . . ."

What she brushed from her cheek as she went, might have been a tear or a honey-bee. At any

rate she closed the door behind her, and did not return.

Moderately astonished, Corsant remained for a time waiting. Among the whimsies frolicking in his brain, however, came once more the desire for fresh air.

" 'It is my opinion, Brother Tadger,' " he told himself, " 'that this meeting is drunk.' Eh? Shocking. Out you go! "

Sunshine, after that gloom in the Ring of Bells, blazed white. It pained his eyes. Yet the world outdoors had grown wondrously gay, filled with charming details all fresh and new, a perfect Vanity Fair of them outbidding one another. He surveyed the street, where nothing moved but a few petals that snowed, as before, lazily down over stone walls. The beauty of it dazzled him. He had never seen or smelled flowers like those. Across the bridge, he fell into another muse before a gate-post, on which a family of snails had gathered to sun themselves. Admirable: the very marking of their shells . . . That train of thought arrived nowhere. His study was nevertheless profound.

" 'All in the merry month of May! ' "

He became aware that he was humming rather loudly.

"Oh, that mead!" he groaned. "Plain maudlin. I must walk it off."

He shook himself, and set forward briskly, choosing a pleasant cover of green leaves where a path wandered along the brook. With cool sounds the water accompanied him through thickets dense enough, quiet enough, shadow-hidden, to seem the heart of a forest. Birds darted up from bathing, and left tiny rings that widened on the pools. He could have gone on with delight, mile after mile. It was all too soon that the brook ran forth into open fields, turned commonplace, and stagnated as a kind of ditch between rounded banks.

Yet the fields were pleasant also in their way, broad green slopes to right and left, streaked with misty white acres of daisies, a notch of sea water sparkling at the far end. Some sheep trotted off before him.

"Not so bad." Corsant followed them and the sunken brook. "They grow plenty of sky round here. The merry month of May."

A rough wooden bridge connected the banks. Beyond it, to his left, a red flag waved limply in the circle of a putting-green. A fat ewe stood alone there, and bleated for her child across the water. Past her the landscape ran upward in long

hollow curves, to where the top of a church tower peeped over the sky-line.

"Miles of it, and nary soul in sight."

Something whizzed by his head like a bullet. He dodged.

A golf ball hopped on the farther bank, hit the ewe fairly in the ribs, and rebounded. She ran bundling away, while the ball rolled down under the bridge.

Leonard turned to see where this missile had come from. On his right hand, a low but steeply rounded hill rose bare against the sky.

"A good shot," he considered.

For a time nothing happened. Then over the hilltop some bit of metal flashed against the sun, and a man's figure heaved into view.

It was a young man. He came walking rather carefully, with a limp or hobble, and used his golf iron to ease himself down the green slope.

## V

THE young man was alone, carried but a single club, and came scanning the ground below him negligently, as if not more than half absorbed in his game. He wore loose old clothes of reddish brown tweed.

"Good morning," said he, with a casual nod. "I'll swear that was headed straight. Went off clean as a chip."

The golfer had a pleasant voice. He was of about Leonard's height and age, but more slenderly built, or perhaps worn by illness, for his face looked rather pale.

"A beauty. Hole high," said Corsant, and rehearsed the fate of the ball. "She's under the bridge."

"Oh! Thanks. Glad I didn't hit you." The man's keen blue eyes were busy admiring the whole sweep of country. "Good old prospect, isn't it? I'd forgotten how ripping."

He spoke half to himself, moved by, and toss-

ing his iron among daisies, climbed down the bank, Leonard retained an impression that the chap was rather handsome, and that they had met somewhere before. Presently, under the bridge, his voice rang hollow.

"Mucky down here. Dark, too."

Reappearing for a moment, he threw his jacket up beside the iron, then stooped and vanished again.

"Quite sure it rolled under, are you?"

Leonard answered this by taking off his own jacket, dropping it near the other, and scrambling below the far side of the bridge. Thus in a dark hole the two men faced each other, bent almost double.

"Your ball should be right here."

It was not, or stayed well hidden. For a time they spied about in mud, watercress, footprints of sheep, and cobwebby corners, all confused with joggling sunlight from the brook.

"I can remember round here as a tot," said the stranger. "Ali Baba, Robinson Crusoe, and Ben Gunn used this place by turns; it was Jean Valjean's sewer, one time; and old Macumazahn—what's his name? Quartermain?—met some frightful kind of monsters on this underground river."

"Giant crabs," quoth Leonard. "A dead swan——"

"Right, by Jove!" His contemporary laughed. "And the Flower of Light, and the burnt canoe, and the parboiled nigger! All comes back now. Alph the sacred river. Odd to think—Humph!" He went on searching, then added gruffly: "Good deal of water's flowed under these old planks, I fear."

Next moment he spoke again, in a different tone, quickly, as though surprised.

"I say, here's a rum fancy! It strikes me— Did we ever do this same thing together before by any chance?"

In the half light, crouching like a pair of conspirators, they eyed each other closely.

"Why, you know," replied Leonard, "it does seem, well, familiar. Can't say how."

The other nodded, slantwise, like a man puzzled.

"You felt that, too? But—do you live about here, by the way?"

"No," said Corsant. "My first visit."

"Ah, then we haven't," said the stranger, lightly. "Curious, though. Some former incarnation.—This mud is hopeless. Let's give it up."

"Afraid so," began Leonard. "No, here she is. Have got."

The golf ball lay drowned at the bottom of a tiny pit, one of the sheep's footprints. He fished it out.

"Never fails," remarked its owner. "Many thanks."

He straightened up, and brought his head sharply against their roof.

"Ouch!—Alph the sacred river has shrunk, like everything else. Bumped my stately pleasure-dome, eh?"

All this while the mead had exercised a benign though failing power; it made their talk under the bridge seem, to Leonard, an affair of great humor, lawless charm; and now as they crawled forth into sunlight, it moved him to laugh at the man's words more than they demanded.

"Pleased you, did I?"

Conscious of a mild scrutiny, Leonard spoke out. Something easy and frank in this chance acquaintance drew his confession.

"Don't mind me. I took a drink back there, and for some reason it turned out to be an old ancient whopper. Looked tame enough, but stood right up on its hind legs afterward and neighed."

The golfer picked up his iron, dropped the ball

over his shoulder, paused, and glanced round with a tolerant smile.

"It will happen to us, won't it?" he said kindly.

"It will," returned Corsant, "when an old woman by the wayside circumvents you with mead."

No sooner had he uttered these words, than the keen blue eyes regarding him flashed once, hardened, and lost all friendliness. Their lids drooped as though weighed down by sleep. The stranger's face turned scornful, then let every sign of emotion whatsoever die.

"Ah?" He might have been about to answer, but did not. Instead, he addressed the ball, stopped, bent down, lifted it, snatched one of the coats from the grass, whirled it over his arm, and without a word marched angrily away, limping. He crossed the bridge, to follow the other bank downstream. The baize-green circle of lawn, where the red flag hung fluttering, he passed as if it were contaminated.

"Now what on earth did I say?" Leonard stared after him. "Temper? Golly, what a temper! And a good chap like that, none better, you can see: what got into him?"

The thing outstripped conjecture. He could only watch that indignant form striding into the

distance, conquering its limp, and visibly fretting to be gone out of reach.

"Gave up the hole, too."

He saw the man stop by a green-painted box, tee his ball, shrug himself into the jacket, drive cleanly, mark some invisible flight, and set off to follow up the long field streaked with daisies. His club-head twinkled in the sun. He never looked back.

Puzzling over this encounter, trying to recall their talk and sift out the offence, Leonard went his own way down the brook. Mother Grayland's liquor ceased its inward prancing: that inordinate cupful of mischief passed from his mind.

"A strange kind of morning altogether," he reflected. "And the wind-up strangest of all."

For coolness, he let the jacket hang down his back, carrying it by one finger hooked through the collar-tape. At home again, upstairs, he tossed it upon his bed. That afternoon he spent in Mrs. Merle's honeysuckle bower which, at the far corner of her little garden, afforded a sweet-smelling retirement. Nothing disturbed him here but now and then a white-throat slipping among the starry flowers, or darting over hedge and wall with a rattle of song. His landlady's pet sheep—

once a cosset lamb, now aged and purblind—came to lie down with the old white bull-terrier on the grass beside his chair. In their innocent company, like part of an Aesop fable, he was accustomed to write his few letters, doze, read, or take tea. A pocket map of the country engaged him to-day: he measured with his pipe-stem the scale of miles, and a crotchety line that zigzagged over the green surface.

"Call it twenty-four," he thought. "Weather's too fine for sitting in trains."

His pocket money had run low. The nearest bank for his letter of credit was in a large seaport, distant more than two pipe-stem lengths on the "reduced survey" map.

"To-morrow will be Sunday. Twenty odd miles. I'll walk it: start after church and be there by dinner time."

Having made so much effort, he lay back and persevered in idleness. Not until evening, half undressed in his room, did he bother with preparations for to-morrow's journey. They were simple.

"Tobacco's out. Must go buy some before the shop closes."

Dressing again, Leonard caught up the jacket that lay on his bed. He slipped into this garment, opened the door, and suddenly halted.

"What's this? Growing heavier, am I? Surely not since morning."

There could be no doubt about it: the jacket bound him slightly in the arms'-eyes. He returned to the window. By such light as came through vines and elm branches, he found himself wearing ruddy brown tweed, old but handsome, of an unwonted softness to the touch.

"Wrong one!" said Leonard. "It's the other chap's. What a nuisance! Drat the old woman's mead! How are we to exchange back again, now?"

He could not remember anything in his own coat that would enlighten the golfer. Perhaps these pockets might contain a card or a letter: he felt through them.

"Nothing outside."

Inside, however, his fingers discovered some kind of documents, which he drew out. These were two: the first an old manila paper envelope, empty, and bare of writing; the second an ordinary letter, open and addressed. Leonard, scowling in the twilight, read with great surprise his own name:

"L. Corsant Esqre."

He stood wondering; then, to make certain, he lighted a candle and read the superscription again.

The writing was good commercial hand, the name plainly his own.

"May be an introduction: a chit the man was bringing, to look me up."

It was not: the thing contained only a receipted bill showing that in London two days ago L. Corsant Esqre had slept and breakfasted at a little out of the way hotel.

"It's a lie and a pretty cool one," he reflected. "Never heard of the place before.—Why, Mr. Hot Temper this morning must have been using my name."

So he said, but so he did not believe, remembering the stranger's face and manner. Leonard blew out his candle, restored the papers to their pocket, leaned in the window, and thought. Mrs. Merle's deliberate footsteps moved in her garden below. The sound brought him inspiration.

"Why, of course. Plain as a pike-staff," thought Leonard. "I'll ask her; should have done it long ago. Self-evident."

He lost no more time, but ran downstairs and greeted Mrs. Merle on the threshold. She was bringing her bullfinch indoors for the night. They stood and chatted for a while.

"Oh, by the way," said he. "Is there anybody

else of my name living in this part of the world nowadays?"

Florid, round, cheerful and slow, the landlady balanced her bird cage. It resembled her in shape, like the wire model of another Mrs. Merle, doll dressmaker's size, cut off at the waist. She weighed his question.

"Why, no, sir. No, indeed."

Her answer left him disappointed, in the dark again. She could not have understood.

"Are you quite sure of that?" Leonard persisted. "No one else at all? There must be."

His hostess regarded him with mild bewilderment.

"Well, sir, living here all my life," she said, in a wounded tone, "it's not likely I wouldn't have heard. Anyone else of *your* name, that there is not."

Leonard thanked her, left her mollified by some general observations, and went out. The evening sky remained bright, a pale-green splendor above the trees; when he had bought his tobacco, he lingered in the street to admire that slowly fading hour of stillness; but he could not enjoy it, being puzzled and vexed. Here he went in another man's coat, with a receipt for money which he had never paid, and which involved things he

had never done. "Unless in my sleep," he grumbled. It was enough to create feelings of somnambulism, double existence, crookedness.

"Hold hard. I've got it by one end, now," he decided. "The bee woman was afraid of me. That might be dotage. But then, our tall friend on the beach, with the pony, thought he knew me well. Go find him. At the Ship on Ways, he said. Where the dickens is that?"

Halting, at gaze, Leonard marked how the river, far down beyond fields, curved like a sickle and shone like glass. The hills under which it lay were melting in smoky brown shadows that promised heat for the morrow. Very broad and solemn the vista appeared, through this peephole of a lane.

"Where's the Ship on Ways?"

One door in the lane stood open. The blacksmith, working late, crouched over something he had carried out to finish while daylight lasted.

"Good. Peacock can tell where that is. And Peacock will know our friend's name."

With that, Corsant drew near and gave the smith good evening.

## VI

MR. PEACOCK squatted on the ground, with a vermilion paint-brush in his hand. Against the door post leaned one great leaf of an iron gate, beautifully wrought. He was busy dabbing red lead on the hook of the lower hinge.

"Good evening, sir," he replied heartily.

"You keep open late," said Leonard. "What a splendid pattern that is."

The blacksmith paused, and laid brush across pot. Both men admired for a time, without speaking, the firm yet flowerlike scrolls of the gate, clean bars, curves and interlacing tendrils combined by some hand that could lay hold of beauty and strip away entangling prettiness.

"Yes, a noble piece of work, sir."

"Yours?"

"Well, hardly!" Mr. Peacock looked up with slow surprise. Then a grin stole over his broad, good-humored face. "You must know that, sir, if anybody does. Having your bit of fun with

me. The hinge was broke, so George he asked me to weld on a fresh pin, you see, which I did." The speaker took his brush, and dabbed on more red lead. "There now, she's done. 'Twill dry to-morrow, ready to hang by Monday morning, and George can put the black on afterwards. I obliged him this far, George having no red handy. I hope it suits. I hope the job is satisfactory?"

Leonard found himself appealed to, as judge. He failed to see why, but answered:

"Entirely so, I should think. It matches the upper one. Very neat indeed."

This verdict seemed to delight Mr. Peacock. His grimy countenance beamed.

"Thank you, sir. I did try to match 'em as near as go." He stepped back and considered his work gravely. "All mine, says you joking just now. Only wish it was. 'Twould be a job to take pride in. George says some old forefather of his fashioned that gate, sir. But then George is more'n half a gipsy, and a terrible liar." The blacksmith paused, then suddenly added: "A terrible liar in his humorous way, o' course I mean; he's a good friend, as we both know, and speaking serious they don't make 'em truthfuller."

Corsant had never heard of their friend.

"What George is that?"

Peacock, turning from his contemplation, began to stare.

"George Grayland, sir."

"Yes? Who is he? I don't seem to——"

"Lord love you!" cried the smith. Wonder overcame him. Then, slowly, his eyes grew troubled. On the point of replying, he checked himself, bent down to recover the red lead pot, and set it carefully inside the door. When at last he spoke again, over one shoulder, his voice was persuasive and subdued, his air of apology almost coaxing. "Why, you'll remember George, I'm sure. Him that was here with me, the other morning, to get the old pony shod. As you was passing by."

The manner of this speech, thought Leonard, contained a puzzle: he let it go, to welcome the matter.

"Ah, yes. He's just the boy I want to see. Where's this haunt of his, again, the Ship on Ways?"

"Down below, by the river." Peacock rose, and with a chuckle as of relief, stood pointing. "It's the ferry house there, where Ashkettle's daughter keeps her boats. The name's failing out o' memory, nowadays. My grandfather used to say they did build three four little dinky ships

there, Henry the Eighth's time. Bless me, I knew all along you wouldn't have forgot George. You'll find him there, Saturday night."

Corsant helped to carry the iron gate into the shop, and left Mr. Peacock thoughtfully watching him, as before, down the lane. Dusk had fallen, but not thick enough to blur the tips of bracken near by, or quench the yellow embers of gorse on out-cropping rocks. The river still gleamed, under shadows now settling hard and black. Lamp-light strayed through the open door of the Ship on Ways, too early to shine far, soon lost on the grass-grown slabs bordering the water.

Inside, the first man Leonard saw was his unknown friend George, the terrible liar. He stood near the lamp, a tall handsome figure, laughing. A cloud of tobacco smoke curled along the beams—dark treenailed oak, Armada wreckage—close above his head. Beyond in the heart of this cloud sat half a dozen men with their beer. Someone had just cracked a joke.

"Yes, that is so. But you don't count." The tall man beguiled his audience with a wink. "You came from Zennor, where the cow ate the bell rope."

Whatever his retort signified, it took effect like Old Grouse in the Gun-Room. Laughter, loud

and unanimous, broke out from the conclave. Leonard could not even distinguish the victim. He himself remained in the dusk,—unseen, he thought, but before their merriment had fairly begun, the tall man turned as if making a lazy, triumphal exit, slipped outdoors, took him lightly by the arm for a moment, and began at once to walk with him side by side away from the house, up the hill.

"Yes, sir. Good evening. What can I do for you?"

The man's alertness was a marvel.

"You must have eyes in the back of your head," said Corsant.

"Heard you coming." His companion chuckled. "I suppose you want to have a talk with me?"

They passed through leafy darkness in a gap, entered a field, and paused there on open grass. It was owl and bat light now, but each could see the other's face dimly.

"Yes. You can answer a question or two for me, if you will," said Leonard.

"At your service."

"I believe your name is George Grayland?"

"A very safe beginning," replied the tall one, and laughed. Yet as he did so, his manner changed. His eyes, that seemed to sparkle even

in that gloom, seemed also to take on a cutting edge and grow hostile. Corsant felt them watching him; seeing him all anew, from head to foot. It was an odd impression quickly past; for the man continued as before, with easy good nature. "Yes, I'm George right enough.—But look here. We'll probably have a good deal to overhaul; why not say it in comfort and private? My time's yours, of course, but I did promise to do a fool's errand this evening. Up at the church. Suppose we go there? Not far, you know, and questions will keep."

Leonard consented. They climbed the fields together, and went up the lane past Peacock's by early starlight. All the way Grayland talked at random, in his deep and pleasant voice.

"Yes, sir, as you say, that iron gate's a fair wonder. Makes their Jean Lamour grilles and such look silly enough, to my mind." He discoursed on weather, and fishing, and somebody's mare who had foaled; then, as they left the village below and entered a darkness where grave-stones leaned, under elm branches and the stars, he explained his errand. "I told my—— You see, I promised an old woman to get her some church-bell grease for an ointment. She cures

the hives or shingles with it, so they say. We'll have to rob Gabriel."

At the church tower he halted, jingled some keys, unlocked a door, and helped Corsant over a blind step.

"You have the run of the place, then," said Leonard.

"No. I'm a damn bad church-goer," sighed Grayland, in the dark. "But the ringers keep me as a hanger-on, of sorts; because when a boy I lived once with a *carillonneur* in the low countries."

Corsant heard him groping near by. He swore under his breath.

"Some fool's gone and left the candle upstairs. Never mind, sir. It's plain round and round, if you keep to the broad treads on the outside."

They mounted a winding stair, at the head of which Grayland again jingled his keys and unlocked a door. Boards groaned hollow underfoot on some level place, like a platform. Then a match flared. Grayland lighted a candle, and set it on the floor. They stood in a loft, bare except for two or three stools, a few letters or bulletins framed and glazed on the walls, and bell-ropes running up through the ceiling.

"Seven of 'em. A real good peal, first-chop."

By candle-shine the tall man might have been in fact a robber, as he moved softly about, touching the ropes. "Pega, Bega, Tatwin, Turketyl, Betelin—those five are named like the old Crowland bells, burnt in the fire—and Gabriel here, and Mary Rosamund."

He drew a pair of stools near the candle, invited Corsant to sit, watched him do so, glided behind him, locked the door, and pocketed the keys.

"Gabriel's our tenor." He sat down, smiling darkly. "Those are the names of the bells. Now what's yours?"

The question sounded of a piece with his talk; he had not raised his voice; but the black eyes over the candle were sharp as a knife, cool and dangerous. At their first flash, Leonard perceived that he sat locked in a tower, alone with a born outlaw who rather welcomed enemies.

"My name's Corsant."

"Drop it. I mean your real name."

"That's all I ever had. You can't change it by blustering."

The man continued to smile.

"Look here," said he, "let's be frank and talk sense. You can't carry it any further. Not with me. You did look the part well enough before-

hand; in a way. On the beach, naked, yes: you fooled me good. But now, no: there's not much real likeness, and the game's up. Talk sense."

Leonard began to grow ruffled.

"Better give me a lead, then," he replied. "Talk some yourself, and throw in a dash of civility."

The black eyes glanced what might have been admiration.

"Well done. You have studied for it," said Grayland. "I give you credit, friend: you caught just his old sleepy look. But tell me, what is the good of play-acting here? None in the world. So come, out with it. Plump. Right out in daddy's hand. Who are you?"

Leonard, shoving the stool back, prepared to get on foot.

"Already told you," he declared quietly. "We don't seem to understand each other very well. If there's going to be trouble, why, let's begin."

The other made no answer for a moment, but stayed at ease, leaning forward, arms across thighs. When he spoke, it was with the same careless mockery.

"Fighting? Well," said he, "as a rule nobody has to ask me twice either. But that can wait. All I have to do, mark you, is to step on the candle. Once dark, and you're the cat in a strange

garret, me the dog who knows every corner of it. Not fair, o' course. But your kind don't value fair nor foul a dead herring."

"Go on." Leonard rose. "Blow her out."

Stooping, Grayland lifted the candle, but only to balance it on one knee.

"Ready." His dark face brightened. "I like you better for showing spunk. It underlay your looks anyhow; that's what puzzled me, and does yet." He paused, frowned, and changing from his even tone, became deadly grim. "But you're going to unwrap me the whole rig, friend; whether we take to our hands and I beat it out of you, or whether we just sit here all night, Sunday, and all next week. Corsant is my best friend. He's the only man in this world could wipe his boots on me if he chose. I've killed for him before now, in the open, free-for-all. Last night he came home. Here you sit wearing his clothes. What have you done with him? I mean to know. He came home on the quiet, a-purpose, and only two people was to have foreknowledge. Well! Instead, you come sneaking down here, call yourself Corsant at the inn, knock his plans whatever they were galley-west buzzing all over the village, and . . . Why? You'll tell me why, if we have to hang you on a bell rope and scorch the flat of

your feet black. I'm the boy to do dirtier work than that for Laurence Corsant."

His hearer suddenly laughed and sat down.

"All's well, old man. The fight's off. I never mentioned it."

Grayland's eyes narrowed like a cat's. He seemed poised for action, wary of this quick surrender.

"You never mentioned what?" he drawled.

"The name Laurence. Because why, mine happens to be Leonard."

Across the dark man's countenance there swept conflicting emotions, half hidden like rioters in smoke: anger, disbelief, surprise, and a kind of welcoming wonder.

"By the left hind leg o' the——" He completed some tremendous oath in a whisper, and put his candle on the floor again. "Back from over the water! Leonard. American?"

"Yes."

"Return, ye children o' men! I might have known.—What brought you here at this time?"

"Accident. Whim," said Leonard. "On the look-see. I'm sorry if it spoiled anyone's plans."

Grayland wagged his head, thoughtfully.

"You didn't swim left-handed through the Nostrils by accident," he rejoined. "Look here, we

began wrong to-night. Could feel it in the air. Now let's take a clean start and go with the grain."

By common impulse they shook hands. As they did so, Leonard caught a passing glimpse of his own head and shoulders darkly mirrored in one of the glazed bulletins on the wall. He peered at it, and laughed. Seen thus, crouching forward, the reflection told him why the young man under the bridge had seemed only part stranger.

"Your friend Laurence and I have met," said he. "Perhaps you can help us change our coats back." Describing their encounter that morning, he suddenly remembered how much longer ago and farther away his story began. "Why, of course! This accounts for the girl in Alexandria who signed my name. She seemed a gay and forward hussy at the time."

Grayland, hearkening wisely, nodded.

"Girls always run after Corsant. He has no time for 'em.—Yes, he's just home from the East. I was out there with him a while."

The man's eyes declared that he could say much more if he chose. Instead, he waited for Leonard to go on, and then sat listening like a well disposed but vigilant critic.

"In Florence one night a chap came strutting up to me, Prussian officer way; tall, stiff beggar, pale eyes . . . "

The critic suddenly took another posture, with elbows on knees, forehead in one spread hand and one fist. He appeared to be staring at the floor, but his face remained hidden. Thus, a brooding visored shape, he heard Leonard's tale of the restaurant in Sword Street and Sun Street, Gino's café. As the candle-light wavered, his shadow, like that of a desponding giant, swayed on the wall among the black rods of the bell-rope shadows. He made no comment.

"Does all this bore you?"

He shook his head impatiently.

"Go on."

Not until the narrative ended with that very day and morning, did Grayland rouse.

"An old woman circumventing you with mead?" He looked up, his bold eyes twinkling. "No wonder your cousin got the hump! Of all chances on earth, his very first walk at home, that old story to fly up in his face. No wonder."

"I don't know any old story about it," said Leonard.

"Of course you don't," Grayland replied. "There's the miracle." He pondered. "Well,

there. And your great great something dad's sword and shooting-arms laying rusting on the breakfast table. Humph! All these years . . . "

He rose, and stood there in a brown study.

"Well, I'll exchange your coats to-morrow morning all right," he said at last. "You know, Mr. Corsant, I may ask you to do me a little turn some day."

"Any day you like, Mr. Grayland."

"George, please. The whole thing sounds unnatural enough without that, from you, sir."

They eyed each other with great favor. Their quarrel in this dusky loft seemed to have created a bond.

"Oh, by thunder! Forgot my errand." George swung away, grinning. "You keep the candle. I can see 'em all in the dark."

He took from his pocket something white and round,—an old anchovy paste jar.

"For my—for the old woman's holy ointment."

So saying, he unlocked the door by the stair-head, left it open, and with a bound upward seemed to vanish, until Corsant spied his long legs rapidly mounting a ladder. From overhead came his footsteps in the belfry. A moment afterward he dropped lightly into view once more.

"A good gob of grease from Gabriel," he chuckled, tapping the anchovy pot. "Must keep her happy, poor soul, if we have to rob the church."

## VII

THE service, next morning, seemed to drag. Dim light, from a world hidden in fog, made the windows gray but served only to deepen the gloom and the stone-coldness of the church. Leonard fell prey to a mood anything but devout. Everyone in the village had come there to cough; the parson, a worthy and even a genial fellow creature on weekdays, disguised himself with a Sunday manner like that of Cowper's "fine puss gentleman"; and when in the gloom a conscientious choir performed the Athanasian creed, their chant seemed to heave stumbling-blocks, more than were needful, across the thorny path to heaven. Corsant drove away these indecorous fancies. A crick in the back was his reward, and both legs went to sleep; for the pew, a narrow shelf of hard old oak, cut him to the haunch-bone. He grew restless. Moreover, Grayland had promised to meet him before church, to bring his jacket, and had failed. This fog outside threatened to become

rain. Altogether the world was too much for him.

“ . . . I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings  
And vie with Gabriel when he sings  
In notes almost divine,  
In notes almo-ost divine.’ ”

From some pew behind, an excellent bass voice joined the hymn. Its vibration came deep, as if stirring the floor.

Leonard thought he knew that voice. Later, glancing round, he saw Grayland's long frame relaxed in an attitude of patience. The last man in church, and nearest the door, George leaned his head on the rear wall, and pointing his thin beak of nose upward, dreamily studied the rafters. He looked like a black wolf, too lazy to harm the sheepfold.

They met outside the churchyard.

“You singing about Gabriel,” said Leonard as they walked on, “after robbing him! What were you in a church for by daylight?”

“Does a man no harm to chin-chin joss now and then,” replied the heathen, grinning. “Got as much right to sing those words as Sam Medley had to write 'em. Soaring and bumping amongst the heavenly strings! Put the whole orchestra

out, he might; and then it would be a medley for fair!"

He stooped toward a hedge, and from a cranny where no bird could have well hidden its nest, produced by some conjuring trick a parcel and Leonard's jacket.

"I'll set you on your way," he continued, striding along with these under his arm. "No. You don't often catch me there. More's the pity. Like perching on a hymn book rack. Those carvings amongst the roof, they do tell us a heap of old things worth hearing. But then, to sing you the multiplication table, believe that or be damned fashion. No, no: it don't persuade a chap."

In these pagan sentiments Leonard found an echo of his own.

"We think alike, George, about some things."

His companion's bright black eyes darted, side-long, a very quizzical glance.

"That's good.—We ought to."

"Why?"

Grayland ignored the question, or failed to hear. He began talking at random as they went. The fog was now thinning and whitening, to lift; as they crossed the river in one of Ashkettle's boats, a gray disk of sun glowed high among streaming vapors; and when they had climbed the

first hill on Leonard's journey, the sea lay sparkling behind them, all the green country billowing before, dappled with a few last shadows that scudded inland.

"Here. Short cut." Grayland, turning from the lane, struck into a foot-path traced only by a wavering line on the moister grass of the fields. "This will save you many a step. Eat and drink first."

He chose a dry rock on a knoll, sat down, and opening his parcel, brought forth sandwiches and a flask.

"The grub is Cousin Laurence's," he explained. "Also the whiskey: it's genuine Sma' Still."

They pledged each other and fed, with sea air appetite.

"Troubled about your cousin," said the provider of this feast. "You saw he was lame, yesterday, and looks frail? That's where he was tortured by those devils."

Corsant waited, but his friend sat brooding, with dark cheeks flushed and eyes that beheld something evil, far off.

"Who were they?"

"Some damn tribe. A white man put 'em up to it. I haven't caught that noble sport yet." George spoke very softly, but his voice ached with

a passion of revenge. "There's nine or ten of 'em will never torture again. We pulled their stings for good. I happened to be with the rescue party." He woke from musing, and ate his sandwich with peculiar tidiness, like a man who abhorred crumbs. "Your cousin labored," said he, "in the vineyard of the abomination of desolation, out there, alone, the God-awfullest holes in the East. His work, you know, was like good house-keeping: well done, you never see or hear of it; undone, there's gurry all over the shop. Ay, and blood too. He did more'n a dozen of your political agents. Unattached; not recognized; couldn't be. Why, that boy," he cried in admiration, "nobody will ever know what that boy has suffered and done. The quiet little beggar, I told you he could wipe his boots on George Grayland any day. So he can."

The speaker jumped up, strode back and forth over the grass to vent enthusiasm in action, then returned and flung down on the rock again.

"I'm sorry," declared Leonard, "if my coming here upset his plans at all. You said last night——"

"No fault o' yours," growled George. "It did, but just by happen-so. He thought to slip down here, do a flit, no one the wiser. Hadn't been

home since a kid. Well, here was you, weeks ahead, taking his place blindfold, the news going round from mouth to mouth. Can't be helped, that's all. Fate. Luck."

"Bad luck," said Corsant.

"Bad or good," was the reply. "Never can tell till it plays out."

Their mound, a high point in the landscape, had nothing round it but grass and open sky; not a bush, not a handful of leaves anywhere near, and from sea landward to the farthest hill no living creature but a tit-lark that fluttered and twittered in the sunshine two fields away. Yet Grayland, before he spoke again, looked on all sides carefully as though in a room. He lowered his voice.

"What lays heavy on my mind," said he, "is this. The pole-cat we spoke of just now, nobleman who had our boy tortured and maimed, will follow on down here if he's got wind. Good reason why. Expect him any day. He's a dirty fighter, and dangerous. Well, so'm I: nothing would suit my book better——" Grayland's powerful and shapely hands grappled some imaginary bulk, wrenched it in two, and cast away the pieces. "But I can't always be on deck. And with Laurence Corsant sick as he is, needing rest—Well,

I'm off. Here's your coat. That damn beast may be prowlin' 'round the house now."

They rose. Leonard unbuttoned and was removing his namesake's jacket, when suddenly he stopped, and pulled it on again.

"No. Why swap?" he asked. "Here's an offer. I did the damage, so give me a chance to repair it."

"What do you mean? How?"

"Mr. Laurence Corsant needs a rest. Suppose we let him have one. I took his place blindfold, you say. Now, if he's in danger, suppose I took it again for a time, blinkers off. Would that help?"

Grayland stared.

"Goliath o' Gath!" he cried.

"You and I, George, would make a strong team. Me the bait, and you to land the fish."

The older man laughed.

"They call me wild," said he, "but I begin to believe, alongside of you, son, I'm a fuzzy lamb on wheels. Danger, yes. Come now, bar nonsense."

"You bet, bar nonsense," replied the younger. "It would be larks."

"Might not." George shook his head. "You run along, boy. See that gorse a-shining on the

next brow? Turn to your right round that. I'm off."

Half way down the slope, Leonard heard footsteps come flying after him. He turned, and saw that Grayland's long legs could cover ground amazingly.

"Bait, I'm tempted to use you." His friend pulled up, and clapped him on the shoulder, grinning mischief. "You'll hear from me to-morrow or day after. If 'twill work, I'll put you on the hook like old Izaak, as if I loved ye."

Turning to go, George had a second afterthought.

"You'd better know, in case," he added. "You'd better know, Bait, that our fish is that white-eyed, wooden-jointed pike you saw in Gino's café, Street of the Sword. So long!"

With that he set off running again, up the hill as if it were level ground. On the sky-line he flourished his arm in farewell, and dropped below the crest.

Leonard went down alone toward his landmark, the shining gorse. With no lack of thoughts for company, he travelled the hillsides, now so far aloft that he could count the white-washed stones of the coast-guard's path like a bead necklace unstrung along the cliffs, now deep in a valley

chequered with fields of pink and pale green, where the air boiled quivering up the slopes. An hour's walking brought him to a road that glared and sweltered. The afternoon grew hot. Sometimes, but rarely, he passed under shade and verdure in a street of cottages, all still as though abandoned; sometimes, tearing the Sunday calm into tatters, destroying a mile or two of straight solitude, a motor car roared by with dust and stink; but most of the way and the country he had to himself, till heat and lonesome plodding turned monotonous. Once, among the endless show of hedge flowers, he found some white sprays unknown to him: rather pretty, he thought, like dwarf lilies run wild; and while resting, he plucked and pocketed a few, to show Mrs. Merle later, and ask their name of that wise woman.

The tramping became more and more tedious, but Grayland's short cut over grass had saved many steps indeed. Well before sunset he mounted a rise, and saw the ugly blotch where his journey should end,—a huddle of slate roofs glowering bluish under hot sunset, murky with the dregs of Saturday smoke.

"Now bath and dinner."

The hotel to which he asked his way through grimy streets, frowned soberly from its grand

portico, but within was all cleanliness, quiet, and sober welcome. His room proved regally spacious. He was the more surprised, therefore, to find while undressing that it reeked with onions.

"The kitchen can't be so near? Phew!"

Leonard flung open the windows, took his bath, and returning met the reek still there, worse than ever.

"Vile! The stuff's on my clothes, too."

From his pocket he tugged a clean shirt, tightly rolled. With it came tumbling the remnants of those pretty wayside lilies. One sniff, as they lay on the carpet, was enough.

"Wheel!" Leonard gathered them gingerly, and hurled them into the street. "Wild onions or wild garlic. Foh! Shame on you, posies."

Laughing, he leaned out at window until aired enough to go downstairs among his fellowmen. From a big leather chair, sheltered by hothouse fronds, he watched them while waiting for dinner. Amid the usual come and go of a lobby, two small children drew his attention, brother and sister, both dazed by the great world, shy, and dreamy with wondering expectation. They were charming, thought Leonard.

A voice behind the leaves caught his ear.

"Look? I tol' you so. Look there.—Corsant."

He turned his head quickly. Two men stood behind him, at the desk. He saw only the back of the taller one, and the face of the shorter, which was round, dark, and chubby. Neither had spoken to him: both were looking carelessly over the register, as if to pass the time.

"Shut up, you fool. I can read."

They went lounging off toward the street door. Leonard's ambush of leaves hung in the way, and when he rose for a better view it was too late. The children scampered across in that direction, to twine themselves round the legs of a newcomer, a handsome bronzed young sailor daddy, just off his ship, who beyond a doubt was glad to see them. Mother followed more sedately.

Leonard forgave the obstruction.

## VIII

A SOLEMN gentleman in a cage, with a brazen scoop, ladled forth much money and rendered his opinion that the morning was overcast. Leonard accepted the opinion, weighted his namesake's pocket with the money, and having thus quickly finished the business which had brought him so many miles on foot, began his homeward journey straight from the bank door. A memorial clock in a dumpy little tower, staring blear-eyed through fog, rang the half hour past ten as he crossed the square. Few persons were abroad. In belated stillness and gloom, a kind of Black Monday reigned.

To gain variety in his return, Leonard chose another route; but for three hours of good tramping he saw no more than the green borders along its way, the same hedge, the same branches of elm, ash, thorn, or beech, the same margin of field continually repeated through a world of smoky drift and dampness. At times this drift brought with

it a sound or two: sheep bleated far aloft, harness leather creaked near by, a ploughman upbraided his trampling horses, a dog barked in the distance, a sea-gull miaowled overhead: but these evidences of life unseen came rarely, and for miles together he heard nothing except his own footsteps, saw nothing to right or left beyond the green edges of the void.

Early afternoon found him hungry and steaming hot. The road plunged down some valley, the narrowness of which made itself felt by a more sultry moisture, and seen in patches of hillside floating high through the fog. At bottom here Leonard came without warning, almost between strides, into another village quiet as though forsaken. Midway in the street rose an elm: By its trunk, less graceful but no less round and erect, stood a lone figure, a constable meditating on the absence of crime.

"In uffish thought," was Leonard's commentary. He approached the elm, greeted the thinker, and asked where food was to be had.

"Well, sir," said the constable, slowly, as if revolving in his mind a Homer's catalogue of taverns, "you might try the Bottle of Hay. In fact, it's the only one. That little house yonder, with door open."

He pointed stiffly down street, to the far end. Corsant thanked him, and passed on.

The cluster of cottages hidden under green leaves and gray vapor, had swum into view quietly as part of a dream, and even now, though plain, solid, built four-square to last, it kept a dreamy old look. Sleep had been poured on its head, an exposition of slumber lay warm on the gables. Mother Goose might have lived and written here, nothing happened since her time. The Bottle of Hay, a beetle-browed tavern, sat squinting down at a causeway and a veiled strip of marsh.

Leonard stepped through the open door, but nearly backed out again at once. After so tidy a street, this interior was downright scandal. Round the greasy wainscot ran a black frieze of smudge where heads had lolled; glutinous rings marked every table top, shining like the trail of a slug; the gloom was close, hot, rank-scented, and the floor swam with puddles of Saturday night's leaving.

"Yes, sir." A dreary slack woman, neither old nor young, dragged herself forward from some lurking-hole. "Good evening, sir. What can I get you?"

Leonard paused on the threshold. He took a

kind of shame-faced compassion on her at first glance, a helpless being, foredoomed. Besides, the next food would be some ten miles farther. A long course of Chinese inns had left him hardened.

"Whatever you have best, please." Resigning himself, he hung up jacket and cap on a peg in the vestibule.

By pulling the inner door wide open, he could sit behind it as in a private box, and perhaps forget the rest of the room. By pushing outward a stubborn window over his head, he caught more fresh air, at any rate, than had passed that way in years. Tobacco ashes covered his table, but he blew them away, spread an old newspaper for his cloth, and sat down to swelter in patience.

After a time, he heard the woman returning.

"Here, behind the door!" he called.

"Oh, sir, I thought you were gone."

She spoke as if that would have been the more natural discovery, and coming round the door, brought her best into his corner. It was bad cheese, worse bread, and excellent beer in a sticky mug.

Leonard paid her, intending to drink promptly, then carry his food along with him outdoors. The woman had not dragged herself out of the room again, however, before a sudden whirring noise

came rapidly down the street, grew into a sputtering roar, and ceased abruptly. Two voices beneath Leonard's window exchanged words that he did not catch, and soon afterward feet trampled in the vestibule.

Remembering that his jacket hung there and contained almost all his money, Leonard peeped through the chink of the door. He saw two pairs of khaki-colored legs go by.

"Beer," said a harsh voice in the room. "And bread. And be quick about it."

Chairs creaked. A man sighed.

"*Ah, comme j'ai soif! Bon sang, je suis tout mouillé!*" he declared plaintively. "*Il faut rester ici pour——*"

The first voice broke in, growling:

"*Tu as bien souffert, pauvre ange! Bah, j'en ai assez, de tes malheurs. C'est le mic mac, ça. Mais attention, écoute——*"

The talk flowed on, in undertones. Leonard, finishing his ale, heard enough to know that the accent of both men was barbarous. They could not be French. It struck him as odd that they should sit there earnestly employing a language foreign to them both. He pressed his temple against the greasy wainscot, brought one eye to

the chink of the door, and so looked through, along the wall.

Facing him, three yards away, sat the little chubby man who had read his name aloud from the hotel book last night. The fellow now wore misfit cycling garb, dust-colored, wrinkled, and sweaty. He mopped his dark cheeks with a handkerchief none too clean, and glowed like a furnace. Of his companion Leonard could see only half a shoulder.

"Missed him? Till now, yes. But he must have gone this road: we tried the other far enough. If we don't overtake him, what then? Keep straight ahead, and be there waiting, on the ground beforehand."

Thus, in bad French and always harshly, the man to whom the shoulder belonged was grumbling, when some object outdoors fell with a crash.

"There goes your damned motor-cycle again!" he cried. "I told you to prop it, imbecile!"

The speaker jumped up from table, and marched out, cursing. A moment later he returned, more slowly, and appeared to halt near the threshold.

Leonard bent forward. Aslant through his good practicable cranny he spied, in the vestibule, a rather tall man angrily pulling off his coat. His

motions, though energetic, were stiff and muscle-bound. While tossing the garment over a peg, the stranger beheld Laurence Corsant's old ruddy-brown tweed hanging there. He gave a perceptible start, pounced on it, handled, scrutinized the cloth like a tailor, then quickly turned to look all about.

His face, his pale gray eyes full of shifty light, were unmistakeable. Here within arm's reach stood George's polecat, the man who had gone sneering through Gino's café in Sword Street.

Next moment, cool and swift, he was rummaging in the jacket. Leonard, with great indignation, saw his own belongings pulled out, scanned, then by flying fingers transferred into the pockets of the stained yellow coat alongside.

"Smiling, are you?" thought the young man. "You'll smile other side your mouth, in half a jiffy."

He sat still, waiting.

The pickpocket entered the room on tiptoe.

"Psst! Kamsa!" He startled the chubby one with a whisper. "Our man's here, in this house!"

Leonard was quick in action, light on his feet. Without a sound behind the door, he climbed upon the table—the bare end, taking care not to touch

the newspaper—and wriggled through the window like an eel.

"Is he, though, this man of yours?"

The street lay empty and Mother Goose-like as before. Under his great elm tree the constable, in profile, strictly meditated.

"Shan't disturb you, my boy. We'll do our own law. Tooth for tooth."

From the doorstep he heard that pair still buzzing vehemently at their table. He stole to the row of pegs, reversed the legerdemain, and emptied his foe's pockets. There was no time for choosing of property. Leonard took all that came to hand, papers, money, anything, crammed it inside his shirt, took jacket and cap, and slid outdoors again.

"A good row would be rather fun," he thought. "I've a notion——"

Just then the inner door slammed. They were searching behind it, in his private box the corner. He laughed.

"No, a jape. A gentle jape were best in this hot weather."

Two motor-cycles leaned against the front of the house. Each had as fine a leather tool-pouch as man could wish. Leonard procured some tools.

He did not hurry. A deliberate humor of deviltry inspired him.

"All my life I've longed to ruin one of these beastly things." He stripped off the first saddle, then the second. "No time like the present. Never get such a good chance again." With a pretty little spanner, he gathered a handful or two of vital nuts, which he threw broadcast away. Tire after tire fizzed. "It's a pleasure."

On a green bank where the nuts had scattered, humble wayside lilies grew, white and fairy-like.

"Just the thing. My dear old posies. Garlic and onions for dressing."

He picked a handsome bunch of them, and returned to the door. That fellow's cycling tunic had shown a rip in the lining. He found it again, thrust his floral tribute well down inside, and patted all smooth.

*"C'est le bouquet, messieurs!"*

Even then his devil craved something more. He could hear a throaty voice in the kitchen, haranguing or calling the landlady. It seemed a pity not to improve this occasion.

Leonard clothed himself, and then opened the inner door.

*"Bonjour, monsieur."* He politely doffed his cap. *"Il fait bien chaud."*

At the table by the wall sat his little round rascal, with handkerchief now tucked like a bib under his oily chops. This, and the swaddling folds of his gabardine, made him resemble a depraved infant, a dark goblin child.

"Ah, ah!" he stammered. A look of stupid cunning crept into his eyes. "Yes, vairy 'ot, sir.—'Ow tit you know we were Freynsch?"

"I don't," said Leonard, "because I heard you talking it."

This logic appeared to confound the man in the bib, who looked behind him as though for help, then stared at Leonard once more. It was evident he could not descry the face of his visitor, against the light.

"Oh! Ah?" he mumbled.

Leonard began to close the door, but leaned half way in, smiling.

"Will you give your friend a message?" he said. "Mr. Corsant's compliments, and best wishes for a pleasant walk home again. Mr. Corsant will be at the same hotel where he was last night.—Oh, and will you remember? Tell him, Taffy came to my house and stole a marrow-bone."

The man had sprung to his feet, stood waver-

ing, uncertain whether to charge forward or run back.

Leonard did not wait, but closed the door.

On the causeway he stopped long enough to throw their saddles into a pool of marsh-water; then he ran on, chuckling, through the fog which closed and swept away all trace of things behind.

## IX

EARLY next morning, as Leonard came out from breakfast, he found Mrs. Merle, her Maltese cat, the bullfinch, and the bull-terrier forming a family group on the doorstep. In bright sunshine near by, George Grayland stood talking.

"Yes. We'll have rain. Good morning, sir." He glanced up and made a slight motion with one hand, a forward snap of the forefinger. Most men would have failed to see, or disregarded; but Corsant happened to know it for an old sign, which inquires: "How are you?"

"Good morning," he replied, and with spread fingers of both hands "threw a chest," in brief pantomime to say: "Very well indeed."

"Now I'd give a deal, George," declared Mrs. Merle, "to know how you foretell weather so true. Rain? Why, there's not a cloud in the sky."

Grayland laughed.

"The sheep are all gobbling their breakfast,"

said he, "as if to catch a train. Skylarks a-singing wet, too. And right there by your feet"—He pointed down at the cat, who hooked her paw rhythmically over one ear—"see Old Lady Maltee scrub her face for rain. No common sunshiny wash, that; no lick and promise, but solid work. Your garden will be wet before evening, sure.—I've a chit here for you, sir."

He offered an unsealed envelope.

"Come into the garden, Maud," said Leonard, taking it. "I'd like to talk with you. Have you time?"

In the arbor, where the dog and the superannuated pet lamb joined them, the two men sat down for private conference. Grayland seemed very wide awake and cheerful.

"Where," asked Leonard, "did you learn Injun sign language?"

"Your country. Lived among 'em once," replied the other briefly. "But that's old. Your letter's new. Go on, read it. I made him think he wanted to go away for a week. It took some doing, but he never suspected me."

George lighted a time-blackened briar pipe, and smoked thoughtfully while his friend read the letter, first to himself, then aloud.

*"My dear Mr. Leonard Corsant:*

"It was a pleasant surprise to learn whose jacket I had been wearing, and I hope we shall meet again soon. Grayland, who brings you this hurried note, will explain that I am off to town for a few days. If it is not asking you to bore yourself too much, won't you come up and camp here meanwhile? A dull enough house, but you might find it interesting in spots. Grayland would look after you well.

*"Au revoir,* and do let me find you at the house?

"Sincerely yours,

"LAURENCE CORSANT."

"Monday, P. M."

There followed a galloping scrawl of post-script:

"You might even keep an eye on George for me. Tell him by all the ear-marks he is about to break loose again."

The conspirators, in their honeysuckle bower, grinned at each other.

"Catch a weasel asleep," said George.  
"Boasted too early, didn't I?—You'll come?"

"If you still want me." Leonard put away the note, and brought out two other documents. "Fair exchange: here's more news. Do you know a place called the Bottle of Hay?"

George nodded.

"Smells like a rabbit hutch," he testified.

"The same. Well, yesterday afternoon while that note was being written," said Leonard, "I met a couple of men there."

He went on to describe them. His hearer, leaning back in a garden chair, watched him with eyes half closed but far from drowsy.

"That's our pair. Talking bad French, eh? They would. Your little fat greaser, he's a Levantinish mongrel of some sort. Four and twenty blackbirds, all different, in his pedigree. Called himself Kamsa last, but 'answers to Hi or to any loud cry.' He's second fiddle. Your friend from Gino's café is the boss: what I call a professional traitor, playing both ends, then selling out either way, or to third party. Him and Kamsa the Locust. That's the pair."

Murmuring thus, George kept his black briar alight and missed not a word in what followed, the tale of yesterday's performance at the Bottle of Hay. As it progressed, his eyes opened full and sparkling. He slapped his thigh.

"Spoilt the Egyptians good!" he exclaimed, greatly approving. "Off with their chariot wheels, so they drave heavy. You'll do, my son!" And he gave a curt nod, that seemed to bind their alliance for good and all, to drive the last nail home. "It runs in the family."

"While getting back my own," continued Leonard, "these things—ah—fetched loose and came away in my hand." He tossed over one of his documents, an eight-page letter closely written in purple ink. "Female fist. Begins like a love letter, so I didn't go into it."

Grayland had no such scruple. He read carefully from date to signature.

"Tender," he growled; and again—"Tosh!" His lips curled scornfully round the pipe-stem. "Some women will take up with anything—Well," he concluded, folding the pages away, "it meant a lot to her, poor fool, but nothing to me. My chief had better study it.—What's your next trick?"

Corsant passed over to him a sheet of parchment-like paper, blank on one side, covered on the other with line upon line of queer marks, and stamped in one corner with a bright red thumb-print.

"Looks like short-hand, done in printer's ink,"

said he. "The thumb daubed with an oily vermilion paste, you see. Chinamen use something of the kind——"

But Grayland cut short all this, bounding upright and strewing the lawn with sparks, ashes, the bowl of his pipe in one direction, the bitt in another.

"You've done it now, boy!" Glee, triumph, and sly calculation strove in his dark face. "Good on your old curly top, go to the head of the class! O Brave We! Son, you've turned the cat in the pan!"

Next moment he had subsided again, thinking hard, brooding over the paper.

"What is it, then?" asked Leonard.

"No shorthand, anyway," said George. "Arabic, maybe. Wrote by Turks, Armenians, or Kurds, or whey, Moabites, Amalekites,—don't matter a dump. We can't read it, but your cousin Laurence can. Here's the point, though. Whatever it is, whatever it says, our friend kept it on his person, next his hide. He'd give that hide to get it back, probably. Because why? I'll tell you, son: because he and his Kamsa have travelled many a hundred mile to lay hand on just another sheet o' blessed polygots, heteroglyphs—drat the word, you know what I mean—as these figgers

here. In plain language, my chief holds the mate to this very writing. They want it. What happens? Why, in walks you, as gay as Garrick, and nips their own. You turned the cat in the pan. And I'd have give a double tooth to be there seeing you."

Grayland rose, and tucked the sheet of paper carefully into a pocket, which he buttoned.

"It goes home now this minute for the chief. I'll stow her in safe hiding." He stooped to the grass, and assembled the parts of his pipe. "Will you come along? Old man Merle can fetch your bags and stuff in his cart."

"They're not quite ready for moving," replied Leonard. "Suppose I pack and join you later?"

"Right ho. But this can't wait," said the other, turning to go. "Remember, from now till further notice you're Laurence Corsant."

"Very well.—But look here, George, where do I live when I'm at home?"

Grayland gave an impatient snort.

"O Lord, that's true!" He stood fretting and scowling. "All came so natural, I forgot you never lived in the old house. How to map you the way? River runs right past your windows; but by land, all them lanes and blind corners, 'tis a maze, a Fair Rosamund's Bower surely."

"Trot along," said Leonard. "I'll row up."

"Good as wheat!" cried his friend. "Only big stone house to starboard, and I'll wave to you."

Without a sign of haste, yet light and swift as any creature of the woods, Grayland seemed to cross the lawn at a stride and vanish while still talking.

Noon had nearly come before Corsant was ready to follow him. Old Ashkettle's daughter, a taciturn broad maiden, with hair the color of oakum, dwelt under the Ship on Ways in a cellar full of curly shavings, of oars, paint-kegs, rowlocks, ring-bolts, lumps of aged sponge, grease, double blocks, rope, and cobwebs. Among all these and many fragments, in darkness that smelled of clean chips and turpentine, Miss Ashkettle drudged about moping like a stalwart Melancholia who cared naught for the world outside, pondered the futility of all handiwork, and grieved to see so much of its lumber filling her cave. She said never a word, took no heed of time. When at last after immense deliberation she had chosen an armful of gear, and beckoned this tiresome young man with her chin, it was therefore surprising to find her boats the model of readiness and trim order. Tight, slender, dazzling with varnish, they lined the water, glossy as brand new

toys. The spoon oars had their blades painted a brilliant red; spotless cushions lay on the thwarts; and at their sterns, gilded scroll by gilded scroll bore the names of Daisy, Lily, Violet, Pansy, Hazel.

"How very—neat," declared the passenger. Coy, he had nearly said, for the flotilla seemed almost to giggle. "I'll take *Daisy* by the week."

Miss Ashkettle cast off, coiled his painter like a man-of-war's man, wrote his name in a pocket book, folded her arms, and watched him row off. The *Daisy* might have been Charon's barge, and she an oakum-headed sibyl who took dreary joy in knowing he could never come her way again.

Round a bend, he escaped that dark influence, and soon forgot. Among green hill fields, a silvery layer of tide stole up broadening to immerge a curve here of sand-bar, a tiny cape there of brookside gravel. The *Daisy* drew little water, yet grounded so often in clear shallows where an oar could barely dip, that he ceased trying to row, fended her off, and let her drift. The shores, with mirrored grass and flowers under them, floated down in a trance. Here and there a gull sat on the river and squalled out wicked complaints that rang along the surface with whining overtones; once his red spoon-blade grazed a

salmon that lay torpid on bottom; and for some time a mussel-shell lined with blue nacre, freighted with grains of dry sand and one pearl of seawater, sailed alongside him like an elfin cargo-boat, bobbing in the ripples of the undiscernible motion. Cool salt breaths arose to temper the sunshine. But as he drifted inland, these were the only reminders of the sea, which lay hidden behind the hills. Fringes of gorse on two green interlocking headlands formed as it were a giant pair of outspread wings, blazing golden. A dark cloud stretched between, solid from tip to tip.

"George was right," thought the oarsman. "There's rain coming ashore."

Hot sunlight filled the next reach, however, and the next. High in air against blue sky, a man driving two horses harrowed the crest of a great red field, with snowy gulls flying behind him or waddling after worms among the clods. Tree-tops drew slowly across this picture. The river narrowed. Banks of foliage made a winding corridor, quiet except where oozy reflected brightness trembled and poured like misty fire through the under sides of the leaves. The channel grew deeper, in pools motionless to the eye. Leonard could now row.

He came slowly past a point where beech woods

ran down to the water, when suddenly a voice hailed him.

"Oh, I say! Could you help me for a moment?"

It was a girl's voice, near by. He looked over his shoulder. Stranded, close ahead, lay a varnished boat like his own, bearing the red oar blades of Ashkettle and the name *Rose*. She was empty. He ran ashore below her, and jumped out.

"She wouldn't shove off again, you see," continued the voice. It was a very pleasant voice indeed.

Blue-bells carpeted the grove. From water's edge as far as he could see within the trees, blue-bells formed one shining slope unbroken. A girl stood among them. Her white dress glowed with their color, half way up to her waist, as if tinged with light through stained glass. Beech leaves flickered round her hair in a lambency of green.

"Sorry to stop you," she said.

Leonard caught himself staring. It was the girl he had seen with George, a week or more ago in the White Hart coffee-room. He remembered those large dark eyes, that look of friendly mischief.

"Mr. Corsant, I am well punished." The mis-

chief had gone, or changed, he could not tell which. "I'm well punished for trespassing on your land."

She spoke with frankness, rather gravely. Perhaps it was the shifting translucence overhead that made a hint of mockery seem to dart in her glance, hide and seek.

"All the blue under here looked so lovely that I couldn't resist."

Was he supposed to know this colored woodsprite? If so, how well? Playing for time and safety, Leonard examined her boat.

"Oh, that's all right, you know," he declared. "Her stern's against a rock."

"Yes. I tried to lift her round it."

He did so, though the *Rose* weighed heavier than she looked. When about to launch her, he became aware of a sudden coolness, a darkening, a rustle in the air; and looking up, saw the grove clouded, the lower end of the river lashed white by sheets of rain that swept nearer. Grayland's prophecy was coming true, coming fast.

Leonard hauled the *Rose* inshore again, hoisted her nose on the bank, turned her keel up, and laid her cushions on the ground below.

"You'd best take shelter," said he, pointing, "till that's gone by."

The girl came out from her beeches, and looked at the gray curtain that advanced hissing.

"Oh!" she cried in dismay. "I should have been off long ago!"

She jumped lightly down from the bank, crept under the gunwale, and disposed herself in a few neat whisks and tucks. Leonard brought his old brown oilskin, which he placed as lap-robe. The first drops were now spattering.

"This is jolly!" She smiled. Her black eyes danced. "But aren't you coming under my roof?—What nonsense! Plenty of room."

Most willing and yet unwilling, Leonard obeyed and crawled beneath the lower end of the boat. Rain drummed on the strakes, threaded the gunwales with silver, then slid into gleaming points, then dripped, then trickled. Rain hopped on the shore like hailstones. His companion sat clasping her knees under the oilskin, which covered her to the throat. A tuft of ferns, crushed and doubled inside the bow, hung over her head. It cost him a cramp in the neck to see her, for a thwart intervened; but somehow the cost did not count. Here in wet shadow, muffled by his old slicker, this girl had a knack of being prettier than when, just now, sunshine had steeped her from head to foot among blue-bells and beech leaves.

The only discomfort was, he crouched here as a pretender. They kept silence for a while.

"Speaking sub Rosa," she said, "I think this is jolly!"

Leonard agreed. She had a faint downward smile which came and went as if not quite under control, which he liked, but which kept him uneasy.

"You must have been glad to come home."

Now here looms trouble, thought the pretender. Why the deuce hadn't George coached him a bit?

"Weren't you?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Glad, yes, indeed."

Those large clear eyes regarded him from a fathomless depth.

"What are you going to do about Becky?"

He would have answered at once, had he known who or what Becky was,—a girl to be married, a runaway parrot to be found, or a horse he had talked of selling.

"Tell me if it's none of my affair," she begged suddenly, as though piqued. "I didn't mean to——"

"No, no. Becky? No, no, not at all," said he. "Yes, Becky.—You see, I haven't quite made up my mind."

The girl wondered at him.

"Haven't you really?"

A wrong answer: it must have been.

"No, I haven't," he rejoined, turning stubborn.

The rain beat upon the *Rose*, dripped, and splashed without, though not so heavily now. The silence grew long within, and to Leonard more and more distasteful. That fine spirited young face opposite him, lively, delicate in coloring yet wholesome, had become downcast. For a moment he feared she was going to cry.

"It's not like you, Laurence, to be so grumpy with your—with old friends."

So then, thought Laurence the False, he knew her very well. He must speak comforting things. How could he? But speak or be silent, either way, there was no guessing what he might let Laurence the True in for. She was trembling. He could see the folds of oilskin quiver and the fern that touched her head. A craven impulse told him, if she did weep, to crawl out into the rain. He even glanced that way. The rain had stopped, the sun shone.

"Please don't cry," said Leonard earnestly. "I can't bear to have you think so. If I said or did anything to hurt you, please forget. Or anything strange, anything not like—unlike myself, don't

you know? I can't explain it if there was. Not now. But some day you may understand. Soon, I hope."

He stopped, in distress between too much said and too little.

She had turned her face away, and was plucking a fern tip caught in her hair.

"I'm quite ashamed of myself," she declared abruptly. "Quite."

Next moment she was out in the sunlight. Neither spoke again till the *Rose* was righted and afloat.

"If you're going down the river, take my oil-skin with you," said Leonard, and forestalling an evident refusal, added: "I'm not far from—from home, and you'll catch more showers on your way."

The tree tops downstream glittered, but above them came rolling another band of rain clouds.

"You can leave the old thing at Ashkettle's," he urged.

The girl thanked him, and stepped aboard. Taking her sculls, she discovered the tip of fern still in her hand. She made as if to fling it over-side, but paused, and looked up quickly.

"Fern seed. Here." Holding out her hand,

she dropped the torn leaf into his. "For luck. The receipt of fern seed, to walk invisible."

With that she gave way, pulling a very clean pair of oars. A branch jutted out to hide her and the *Rose*; but before turning it she stopped, backed water for an instant, and looking Leonard in the face, quietly spoke.

"It wasn't crying. It was laughing. That's what I'm ashamed of, for I do wish you luck. It's a most sporting thing you've undertaken."

Her blades flashed again. The *Rose* slipped behind the bough.

## X

ROUND the next bend a little green valley opened shining, refreshed with rain. Straight almost as a canal, and quite as placid, the river ran toward a vanishing point under the low arch of a bridge. Three swans rose noisily from the water and flew in line abreast upstream with a great rushing sound of wings. Even as they went, their whiteness darkened, a cloud and another burst of rain driving after them. Drenched while he rowed, Corsant peered up through the shower and saw at his left a gray stone house, that looked down a hillside of rough lawn dotted with shrubs and trees. From one of its many broad windows fluttered something white,—a towel that flapped vigorously and then was whisked indoors. He pulled his right oar, and headed the *Daisy* for the nearest gravel.

Meanwhile he neither felt the rain nor considered his arrival.

"She knew me all the time!" he thought. "Saw

through me, that girl did, and took her revenge teasing."

Down over the wet grass, as he landed, his friend George came striding,—a pair of long legs active under a huge umbrella.

"Wet but welcome! Hop under grandma's gamp."

Leonard made his painter fast to a root, but disregarded the invitation, and stood musing in the rain.

"I've half a mind to buy the good ship *Rose*," he declared, "for a souvenir.—George, who is the prettiest girl you ever saw? She's a young witch, lives among blue-bells, and gave me this." He held out a wet, crumpled green leaf, the fern tip. "You know her. What's her name?"

Grayland viewed him askance with wicked black eyes.

"No weather for day-dreams, this. In with you! Come in. Under the paraploo, my son." And hooking arms, George elbowed him up the bank. "Get dry first at the fire, then you can write her a poem; or sing her a serenade, I'll lend you a concertina; or you can carve some nice fat hearts on your trees roundabout. Plenty of good smooth bark."

Leonard was not to be put off with these rough

conceits, though he returned her talisman to his pocket.

"She called it the receipt of fern seed, and told me we might need to walk invisible. She knew all about us; knew I wasn't Laurence; knew what we're both up to. Called it sporting."

His companion halted, glared, and breathed out something like a curse.

"Young devil, she guessed it! Might 'a' known."

"Yes? Then who was she?" Leonard repeated.

Grayland shook his head. Mirth and chagrin seemed to underlie the frown with which he kept his countenance.

"No telling," he grunted. "I don't know all the young women round here; been away too long."

"You were talking horse with her at the White Hart, less than a fortnight ago."

"No," said George blandly. "Couldn't have done. Never was there in my life."

"But man, I saw and heard you!"

"Day-dreaming again." George started forward. "Impossible. Flat. Never knew a girl whose opinion of a horse was worth listening to."

The umbrella—a monstrous lank-ribbed tent of rusty black cotton—hid all the world except a

travelling circle of downpour and of rough lawn, unkempt and weedy. As they climbed, Corsant had nothing to do but study his friend at close range. He learned very little: that George was wearing indoor clothes, dark, sober, sleek-fitting, which made his face look all the more restless and untamed; that George had been lying just now; and that however long they might discuss this phantom of the blue-bell grove, George would calmly abstain from telling truth about her. They mounted the hill, therefore, in silence.

"Here's your old house for you." Grayland suddenly tilted back his umbrella. "How do you like it?"

Overgrown shrubs, and vines pelted with rain, hid much of the lower storey; but above these, the weathered gray forehead of the house rose clear, overlooking the men, the hillside lawn, and the river with a kind of benignity almost human. It was not a large house; yet the two upper tiers of windows, broad, nobly framed and outlined in carven stone, gave it a spacious air that seemed better than grandeur; and its plainness, thought Leonard, warmed him like the discovery of some new virtue in an old friend.

"Ever so much," he answered.

The umbrella descended. They moved on, fol-

lowing round the house a path covered with weeds and grass.

"By the front door you come in," said George. "We'll do it all fitty, eh?"

But in the upper garden Leonard paused, and dodging out from their grandmotherly extinguisher, looked about him. Red valerian had run wild here, and been trimmed or cleared into rude borders. A driveway, lately weeded and raked, curved off to end among dripping trees, where an iron gate stood half open.

"Why, that's Peacock's gate," said Leonard. "Were there chains across, before? Then this is the house Merle brought me to, the first night!"

"Of course he did." George stood grinning. "And you sat in his cart and threw cold water on him. You looked at your old home, says Merle, neither glad nor sorry, like a dog at his father's funeral."

This landward front of the house, being on a crest, had one storey less than the river side. Its left-hand corner stood imbedded in a great rock high as a man's head, and patched with turf where cranny flowers hung trembling in the rain. But-tressed thus, the house appeared to hold fast by mother earth, hewn stone cleaving to its native hill.

"Come." George opened the front door, in the carved frame of which wall-flowers were growing. "Don't stand here and soak."

He caught Leonard by the arm, pulled, and brought him indoors on the run, like Christian escaping arrows at the wicket-gate. Indeed, the rain fell now like bright arrows shot aslant. Their misty light entered with the men, and echoes of splashing murmured in the room. It was a long, deep room, at first sight gloomy; under a high mantel blazed a fire of boughs; and the ruddy flicker of this, thwarting rather than joining the cold light from windows blurred with water, showed only here and there a glancing line of brightness on old furniture, and sank without reflection, as though quenched, into the sombre oak-panelled walls.

"Well, here you are," said Grayland; then looked sharply at his guest. "What's wrong?"

"One moment. I can't—I can't find the words." Leonard stood in a daze. "Wait till my eyes get house-broken."

As they did so, he became aware of other objects in the room,—dark portraits along the panels, dull gilding touched with firelight, the backs of tall books, a staircase that mounted under a pointed arch. But these and all details were lost

in one overwhelming impression, a whole stranger than any of its parts, because not strange at all. His eyesight understood it, his tongue refused to explain. Without warning he had stepped from another man's garden into a room peculiarly, mysteriously his own. Everything here, color, form, proportion, the carving above the panels, the staircase arch, the conflict of subdued lights and the way they fell—everything was as it should be, rightly placed, in the right direction. So it had always been, and so, never having seen, he had always known it by some remembrance lost until now.

"What's the trouble?" said George. "A chill? Yes, you did. You shivered. Come to the fire."

Leonard suffered himself to be drawn there, but standing on the hearth, remained at gaze.

"The trouble is, I could find my way about here blindfold," said he. "It's as though—it's like a place where I'd lived a lifetime, when I was somebody else."

"Right ho. You are somebody else." George leaned his umbrella under a portrait, and left it to form a brown puddle like prune-juice on the floor. "Nothing to worry about, then."

He stripped off Leonard's coat, spread it over the high back of a chair to dry, brought a footstool,

bade him sit between the andirons, fetched an old loo-table, swung down its top and bolted it, then with long silent strides was gone from the room. Leonard, his back steaming in the grateful blaze, hugged his knees upon the footstool and wondered.

"George turned left through that door," he thought, "and I knew it beforehand."

He sat mooning, with sounds of the fire and the rain for company. Along the panels, at a height of seven feet or so from the floor, a series of carvings took his eye. They were simple, rather well done and well varied, no wise remarkable but for slight quaintness in design. One of them, however, in the darkest corner on his right toward the garden, broke all rules of the pattern and stood out grotesque as a gargoyle. Too lazy to rise, Leonard peered at it for some time before concluding that it was not an imp's head in a night-cap, but a queer little image of the Devil's Nose, the sea-rock he had swum through. There in miniature, holes and all, it clung to the wall like a wasp's nest, ugly and misshapen.

"What's that doing here?" he asked, when George returned.

"The good old Nose? Why not?" Grayland bore in, and set on the table; a vast tray covered

with bread and butter, Cambridge brawn, half a ham, gooseberries, cream, and bottles of soda. "Why not? That was carved many a year ago, that and the rest, by the man who made your iron gates, I've heard tell, and all the jokers up aloft in church."

While answering he went out again, presently to come back with a tantalus and a tumbler that looked as long as an ale-yard.

"Once was a story about that carving," he continued. "What to signify, nobody knows. Something we've all forgot. Bad luck, or good luck. Some old wives' tale."

Into the mighty tumbler he poured a hero's dram of whiskey, and when he had mixed it, came to the hearth.

"Down her, if you please."

In doing all he moved like a zealous, grave, and highly trained man-servant; his voice, always pleasant, he seemed to lower when indoors; and now after placing a chair and seating Leonard by table and tray, he stood at hand, attentive, ready for orders.

"Come join me."

"I'm only caretaker here."

"Hang it, George, sit down!"

He did so, laughing.

"Mr. Laurence couldn't have said that more like himself," he declared. "You're one of 'em. The same sleepy look when ruffled."

He sat talking while his guest ate and drank. The fire-light played on his handsome, tawny face, but was no brighter or livelier than the changes that came and went there like a visible running accompaniment to his thoughts. Leonard watched him, pondered, and was baffled again and again. Whom did the man resemble so closely, yet with so many differences?

"Ay, who is it?" George suddenly asked.

"Why, how could you read my mind?" said Leonard. "How did you guess what I was thinking?"

George smiled, rose, and darted one of his wicked cornerwise glances.

"It was revealed to me in a dream," he answered very drily. "I must go fetch wood to mend the fire."

He went out grinning. A door shut, the sound of his light footsteps passed down a stairway somewhere, the fluttering of the fire and the splash of rain succeeded. A long time passed. Then suddenly the light footsteps came bounding upstairs, and Grayland reappeared in the door. He

brought no wood, but carried an axe. He was frowning.

"I don't savvy this," he announced quietly. "Something going on behind our back. Come over here, will you, and see what I found."

He beckoned, then crossing to one of the garden windows, bent his head and fell into a close, workmanlike scrutiny. He appeared to be testing, with his thumb, a defect in the head of his axe.

## XI

LEONARD followed him to the window.

"What do you make of it?" said George, tracing with his thumb-nail along the blade. "What's that stuff?"

Newly ground, the axe had a sharp edge. The brightness of this was overlaid and dimmed by a stain, a tinge of heliotrope color shading into purple, as if someone had brushed the steel hurriedly, on both sides, with changeable ink. It felt dry to the touch.

"Juice," ventured Corsant, "or sap."

"Sap, yes," replied George impatiently. "But what kind? I can't remember, can't put a name to it again. Sap of what tree?" The question seemed to perplex him inordinately. "Mark you, not a soul about the house but one old woman who's cook and bed-maker; she goes home at night, by the way. This axe lay where I put it. I always keep tools proper, in place. Who's come and tampered with it, and what was he choppin'?"

George put his nose to the blade.

"No smell," said he.

As he leaned there in the broad old window, frowning, slowly examining the tool on each side, he called to Leonard's mind another graceful person who long ago "with his keener eye the axe's edge did try." Lovelocks and a court dress would have made him a figure of Vandyke's; his face belonged to an earlier century; but his black eyes were sharper than any king's. Gradually the wrinkles left his forehead. He began to whistle Money Musk between his teeth, and dandle the axe in time with that jig.

"Half a mo'. It's coming back." His thoughts also had reverted to the past. "When I was a lad and worked for Lord What's-name's gardener on the Riviera—Wait. Hold hard. Yes, have-got. Mimosa juice. Now where on these grounds, do you suppose, can there be any mimosa?"

Grayland hung the axe-head over his shoulder, whistled Money Musk again in the same muted fashion, then turned and smiled.

"Let's go see." It was plain he had answered himself, and found the answer to his liking. "Down below, if I'm not sore mistaken."

He led the way to the door by which he had

been coming and going, thence along a dark passage, through some darker vaulted hole in wainscot, and down a flight of blind stone stairs that bent continually with unexpected crankings. Corsant, leaving behind in the great room that sense which it had evoked of things familiar and directions known, groped after him quite lost, down and down, stumbling, guided only by one hand or shoulder on the walls. At the stair-foot, George unlocked a door. They stood presently in a damp, close room, bare, and dismal in a greenish twilight. Three small windows glimmered in a row, obscured without by grass and leaves.

"Soon learn," said George.

He closed the door, and went to the right-hand square of glass. Like the other two, it was set at about the level of his chin. He reached up and struggled with the catch.

"Rusty. Doubt if it's this."

The fastening yielded, the window opened, with a series of aged creaks. Grayland thrust out his hand.

"Ouch! Holly." Closing that window, he moved to the middle one. "We're below ground, you understand. These look riverwards."

The middle square came open harder than its

mate, and still more noisily. Again George put his arm outdoors.

"Yew."

He worried the second groaning frame shut, hammered its crazy catch into place, and tried the third.

"Always the last of a lot," he complained; then in an altered voice, cried: "Hal-lo! My brethren, I should say so!"

This last window swung in easily at one pull, without a sound. A light-green feathery spray, released from pressure against the pane, burst inward nodding and sprinkling the men's faces with water.

"Mimosa for you," said Leonard.

"Right as rain," replied Grayland. "Give us a leg up. I thought so."

Mounting his friend's knee, he poked head and shoulders through the wet leaves. Leonard heard his arms threshing outdoors. He wriggled in again quickly, hopped to the floor, and dashed rain from his face.

"This bough was cut off to clear the window," he reported. "They laid all back pretty near in place."

He struck a match, and by its flame looked—so rapidly that Corsant could but just follow his

glances—at the intruding tuft of mimosa, the top of the window frame, its outer edge, the catch, and the hinges.

“Lately cut. Leaves have had no time to wilt.” George blew out match and closed window. “Catch pried down from outside. With my axe, dare say. Hinges oiled, catch oiled, bough laid across all proper. No, son. They’d never take such pains if they weren’t coming back. Our friends, think you? I’d give a thick un to be sure it was them.”

“Fork out,” said Leonard. “Because I think I know.”

“How?” George demanded testily. “What did I overlook?”

His ally repaid some late mystifications by grinning calmly.

“Unless your old bed-maker you spoke of has been cooking the same.” Leonard paused to keep him waiting. “It’s extremely delicate. But surely you—perceive? I did. I smelt ’em in here.”

Grayland tossed up his head and sniffed. The little subterranean room, dark as a crypt, contained negative odors of mould and dust and air-tight staleness; but through these, not quite gone though very faint, a vanishing aura of something positive, the smell of onions.

"Your dear wayside posies in his tunic!" said George, solemnly. "The precious little stinkards! My lad, you never did a better hand's turn than yesterday's at the Bottle of Hay." He snatched up his axe, spun it dangerously in the air, and caught it like a drum-major. "Now," he cried with joyful emphasis, "we know! Come on upstairs!"

They stood in the panelled room, and the fire, generously rebuilt, was blazing high, before they spoke again. Each man had remained busy with his own thoughts. Leonard put on his jacket, now dry and warm.

"You didn't lock that door after us, below," said he.

"A-purpose," George replied. "Our friends will call again. We don't want to leave any obstacles in their way, do we? On the contrary. Welcome little strangers: walk into our parlor. They're bound to come soon."

The mere prospect was enough to rouse and rejuvenate him. He laughed; his eyes glittered in the fire-light; the swing of his arms, as he beat and shook off the rain-drops from his coat, seemed a gay, brisk exercise to try his muscles, make them supple, and clear his body for action.

"To think o' that Amalekite!" he crowed.

"Carrying your nosegay round the house with him, your forget-me-nots, eh?—But sit down. You've not finished your snack."

Over the interrupted meal on the loo-table, and—when this was in part cleared away—over their pipes by the fireside, the two men sat talking, exchanging plans, ordering a mode of life for their next few days together. In the upshot, it proved a simple mode: they had only to stay there, loaf, Grayland said, take their ease, and wait for whatever should arrive. Outwardly, all was to go on as before. People would know that Laurence Corsant, returned home but now, broken in health and ordered to rest, was living there quietly. His caretaker George would be seen to go errands hither and yon as always, but especially to leave the house before dark.

"I won't go far," said George. "Soon as our old woman's out of the house, back I slip. We'll burn candles half an hour in a bedroom, then blow 'em out: like Mr. Laurence gone to bed, you see. House dark. But meantime we'll be camping right here in this room. A good booby-trap, I call it. What do you say?"

Leonard approved. They dismissed the subject, forgot all cares, and spent what remained of the afternoon in random lazy talk. Forty-odd

years of roving had made George, whatever else he was, most admirable company for a rainy day. Leaning backward with his long shanks outspread toward the fire, his nose pointed at the ceiling, and his black eyes half-shut as they dreamily watched cloud after cloud of tobacco smoke ascend, he recalled an amazing diversity of this world's creatures and told many curious true tales. His language was often rough, but his judgment of persons unfailingly gentle. The man himself, his own doing, appeared in the narratives only by chance now and then, to fix the year of an action or supply an attendant circumstance. Corsant heard all with delight, but above all privately treasured these glimpses into his friend's life. Such a thing had happened when George was "a ragged boy running about the hedge-rows, selling colored whirligigs and paper flowers"; such another when he was "in trouble for stealing a deer"; still other things, when he had been a sailor, or doing all by numbers in the army, or observing mimosa juice and steel on Lord What's-name's Riviera estate, or ringing bells to earn his chow, or catching rough-haired seals from Louie Pierpold's canoe, or serving his Mr. Laurence in a desert, or travelling with a circus through India

and learning Pushtu pretty good. The hours went all too quickly.

"Well, cheer-oh for the present." George rose, yawned, tweaked his cap out from between two red morocco tomes on a book-shelf, and strolled away. "Speak loud to the old girl," he added, in the doorway. "She's deaf, poor soul. And got no more sense than Gammer Vangs, anyhow."

It was in fact both a deaf and stupid old woman who, when Corsant had sat dozing for a long time in the twilight, came and summoned him to dinner. He ate alone in a dark, chilly room, at the head of a long table on which two candles burned forlorn in a many-branched candlestick, like a massive silver tree bared of nearly all its leaves. This wintry light showed him nothing but dusk, outside the glossy expanse of polished wood where his knives and forks and dishes rested on their reflections, all double, as though floating in a pool. The china was old and good, the silver worn but heavy, fashioned like tools for the serious work of many generations. The fish-slice, he thought, would have served to lay bricks with. The food, plainly cooked, had substance abounding, and a pint of excellent claret, well warmed, stood at his hand. Yet beyond these cheerful solidities, all remained in shadow, hovering, unaccountable.

Whenever the woman approached, he saw her as a hard-featured dame, tough, wiry, and anxious, with little whiskered warts or moles dotting her face, and the look of deafness in her watchful eyes; but whenever she retired, the darkness changed her silence and her care into something grim. She seemed to haunt rather than to attend him.

He was glad when the meal ended, and he could seek the fire again in his own room which he knew so well. Another great silver tree stood on a table here. It was full, this one, of candles. He lighted them all, and after pacing the floor for pastime, bethought him of a book. The volumes on the shelves, however, he found to be chiefly collected sermons and Latin discourses on divinity.

Of these he was turning the pages without enthusiasm, when footsteps crunched on gravel under the garden windows.

"That's not George."

Bearing the candlestick, he went to the front door, opened it, and peered out.

He saw only a bent figure hooded in waterproof trudging off through the rain like a black penitent. It was their deaf woman going home for the night. The lamps of some wagon or cart, awaiting her, blinked among the wet leaves by the gate.

Leonard shut himself in, and returned to his

fire. The noise of the rain continued, was now and again swept under by a prolonged rush of wind, began afresh, dropped almost to silence through an interval of calm, and so went on, splashing in gusts or sunk to a moody drumming.

"George takes his time," thought the young man. "Must have gone farther than he intended."

That seemed nothing to complain of. As he sat alone in the house, Leonard felt thoroughly contented, even luxurious by that bright hearth, as much at home for the moment as though he belonged there. He grew warm and sleepy. Whatever might happen later, would be fun: meantime to bask and wait and smoke was pleasant enough.

Yet while he waited, a slow uneasiness crept into his reverie. It was not apprehension; it certainly was not boredom. He could neither name it nor shrug it off. There might have been a new sound in the room; but if so, he had not truly heard it; there might have been a vague movement. Once or twice Leonard turned to look behind him. Nothing was there but his silver Burning Bush of candles, and above them the carved Devil's Nose like an imp's head in a night-cap. He had not expected anything. Nevertheless he acknowledged the nameless fancy: it was as if someone stood behind him waiting to speak, and when he turned, was gone.

## XII

THIS uneasy quiet endured for some time. A sudden click of metal, breaking it, made Leonard start but also relieved him. He turned to welcome something definite.

A key turned in a lock. The front door opened quickly, just wide enough to let a man slip through. The man who did so, and who closed it in the same movement, was George. He had come without a sound of footsteps.

"No news?"

He spoke hardly above a whisper, and stood there dripping but cheerful.

"None," said Leonard.

"Will you draw those curtains, please?" Grayland pointed with his thumb toward the garden windows. "Like the blockhead which I ought not to be at my time o' life, I forgot 'em."

When his friend had pulled the curtains across and overlapped them carefully, he advanced, peeled off his wet clothes, hung them up, and in

his underwear squatted like a tailor, back to the blaze.

"Rotten bit of work, that," he growled, scolding himself. "They could have looked right in on you. I did. Enough like Mr. Laurence you were, sitting here, to fool me for a moment.—So nothing's happened?"

Corsant shook his head. The other in sign language begged a cigarette, lighted it from a glowing brand, and smoked and steamed with great relish.

"To-night's their weather for it, unless they're fools," he declared. "So wet and black, with plenty of noises to cover your own: if 'twas my job, I'd tackle her before midnight. Outside there, a man can't even tell what's near him. The old girl going home passed within touch of me; nor you nor she nor the pony-cart boy guessed I was there, right by your elbows." George nodded at the candlestick. "You stood holding that in an open doorway. Better not any more, my son." He gave this advice with a hard look, said no more for a time, and fell to brooding. "To-night's their weather. Mind, if they do come, bags I the big man. He's my meat."

Leonard glanced quickly at the speaker.

"You sound bloodthirsty, George."

"I only want to come to my hands with that jockey." Grayland threw his cigarette into the flame behind him, and thoughtfully examined his fists. "You leave it to me."

Both men had kept their voices lowered; George spoke in a casual undertone; but the words had a meaning so cold and deadly that his companion watched him closer than before.

"Why now, George, we . . . "

"I know the beast better than what you do. Go ask the natives whose women and babies he contrived to have slaughtered." Grayland rose. "Time to make your bed. Whole thing may go smooth, anyway. No good beating the air. What I mean to say is, if it did come to a fight, I'd kill him as quick as any other snake, without a smatch of pity. That's all."

He stalked away into the darkness, bare-armed, bare-legged, his flimsy white clothing still wet, like a ship-wrecked Robinson Crusoe or a drowned ghost, out of place in that quiet old room. Bending his head under the pointed arch, he vanished up the stairs, to return soon with an armful of sticks and brown canvas. These he laid on the floor below a tall portrait, and rapidly built into a cot, which he shoved against the wall. Once more vanishing upstairs, he brought down a sec-

ond armful, this time, of bedding. With a few practised movements he made all ready, the pillow smooth, sheets folded down, pajamas laid out.

"There you are," said George, and took the Burning Bush of candles to survey his work by. "Hop in. I'll carry this light upstairs and put Mr. Laurence's astral body to bed there, as we agreed."

He was turning away, when Leonard called him back.

"Who's this gentleman watching o'er my pillow?"

The candles flooded with streaming brightness the portrait, its tarnished gilt frame, and a pair of swords, one naked, one in a chafed brown leathern scabbard, that hung on either side. From the canvas a black-eyed young man, with long black curls under his plumed hat, gave them an odd, impatient smile, as though bidding them do their staring and pass on. Dark-skinned, high-colored, humorous, restless, the cavalier stood whip in hand beside the head of a bay horse. Leonard could see how instantly he would turn to mount.

"That sportsman? Some namesake of yours," replied Grayland. "Whoever painted him had to slap it in lively, eh? 'Come on,' says he. 'Come

on, Old Dabstick, get it over.' He was great with the sword, I've heard tell."

The bit of hearsay made Leonard prick up his ears.

"No! Was he?"

"A famous master of the arm, they do say," replied George. "Killed in an ambush outside Tangier. This naked one, here, was his pet little pinking-iron. I oiled her up last week."

Leonard promptly set one knee on his cot and leaning toward the sword, eyed it with care from hilt to point.

"Good plain Toledo," he murmured. "About sixteen hundred. Pretty balance, I should think."

"Hobby of yours?" said Grayland.

"Used to be." Leonard drew slowly back from the weapon, and stood gazing up once more at its owner. "Why," he exclaimed, "there are the lovelocks! I missed 'em to-day when you were handling your axe by the window. George, this man looks like you!—And somebody else."

His candle-bearer grunted, and swung away to the stairs.

"Humph! You've got likenesses on the brain. Let's go to bed. Talking a bit too loud, we were."

Alone with the firelight, Corsant undressed, groped his way between sheets, and lay comfort-

ably watching the shadows jig across the floor. Above him the swords and their master faded into the common darkness of the wall. He woke to see Grayland pass, blanket-wrapped like a tall Indian, and lie down on the hearth.

"Oh, look here," protested Leonard, "I feel like a pig in this bed, when you——"

George rolled over, presenting the shadow of a broad back and narrow waist.

"Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber. Tune, Greenville. This is your old man's watch."

They fell into that companionable silence which is the forerunner of sleep, and which a man breaks only to enjoy it longer, because his fellow across the way appears to be sharing his mood if not his thought.

"George, do you ever hear any noises in this room? Queer ones?"

"Plenty of 'em," replied a smothered voice from the blanket. "Any old house."

"Yes, but I mean——"

"You mean, like somebody waiting to be spoke to," said George, with a yawn. "Or something waiting to be found. I know."

"What do you make of it?"

"Nothing. I'm no great believer in ghosts." The voice burrowed deeper into the blanket.

"But o' course there are old ancient things that don't die and can't rest."

The friendly silence intervened again. Half awake, Leonard watched the fire and the jogging shadows. It amused him to see what litter they two men had already strewn about, like vagabonds camping in a lady's parlor: their clothes and boots, the loo-table still half cleared, George's umbrella against the wall, as fat, shapeless, and traditional as any apple-woman's in the *Chatterbox* of childhood.

"George."

"Oh, what now?"

"Any womankind in this family?"

"Only one, thank God," said the smothered voice. "One sister."

"What's she like?"

Grayland's shadow stirred by the fire, rolled, and lay on its back. His answer, withheld for a moment, sounded both unwilling and vindictive.

"Old maid, standard type," he grumbled. "Flat front. Long neck, coiled round with pearls, like seized riggin'. Smokes and plays cards all night, and snaps your head off." He paused, then as if trying to be just, added: "'But though she wears another's hair, she is an interestin' person.'"

"Well for us that she's not here now," said Leonard.

George chuckled.

"I believe you, my boy. Time we quit talking. Good night."

Rain was the last thing heard. Rain, steady though diminished, woke Leonard next morning at daylight with muffled drums about the house. Having breakfasted and set their room in order, the two men parted company: George to bundle the cot upstairs and take his turn of sleep, Leonard to stand watch through the forenoon. A quiet night had left them both disgruntled, cheating their hopes; and now a long dark day persevered in gloom, hour after crawling hour, without incident or change, without a stir but for the hopping of rain in puddles along the driveway and the wriggling of bright drops down windowpanes. George came from his nap surly, and when twilight drew near at last, went outdoors growling.

" 'Tis neither fit for man nor beast," he quoted. "What's more, I don't believe they're coming, either kind."

He left behind the contagion of his doubt. Alone once more, Corsant paced the room up and down a mile or two, wished the time away, ruined his taste for tobacco, fidgetted, poked the fire, and

grew convinced that he and George were a couple of idiots. Long before dinner time he lighted the candles in their silver bush. After sitting with them disconsolate, he walked the floor again, stared portraits out of countenance, hauled books down and put them up unread. Caleb Trenchfield's *Christian Chymestree*, Hooker's *Sermons*, Calamy's, Frewen's, Bishop Bull's, and Stillingfleet's; Burnet's *History*, Clarendon's: *The Saint's Rest*, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Lockyear's *England Watched*, Johnson's Dictionary; all these he thumbed and frowned into, till for the sake of gambling he shut his eyes and drew a volume.

The lot fell on worthy Bishop Bull.

"Almost a modern. 1827. Gorry! Some rocks for the mind to break on."

Sinking defeated in his arm-chair, Leonard began *The State of Man Before the Fall*. It promised, to his ignorance, a few gleams of bliss from the earthly paradise. But no sunshine leaked out here. Lost in a black sand-storm where Pelagians and Socinians whirled round the protoplast like dead leaves, he plodded on, sometimes buffeted by *quatenus* or *quomodo*, sometimes cheered by sight of Crellius or Smalcus nibbling at an argument among other doleful night-creatures of the desert. His courage drooped.

“ . . . how absurd soever that interpretation may at first appearance seem to be.” Thus Bishop Bull strode manfully ahead. “For upon a diligent search you will find, that *aliquid latet, quod non patet*, ‘there is a mystery in the bottom.’ ”

Here the reader stopped; indeed, he was never to finish the book; for behind him, as it had come last night, there came that vague unrest, a flutter and a sigh. It was nothing. Yet from the corner at his back, empty air called to him without words and a motion ceased. That which was not alive, but which as Grayland had said could neither die nor rest, was waiting. The expectancy made no appeal to his five senses, evaded them, glided through or under and touched at their root the same forgotten impulses he had known yesterday.

Leonard stood up, and turned.

There was nobody, of course; nothing but candle-shine on dark brown oak, and shadows, and in the little pointed carving two holes like a pair of blind sockets. It waited, viewless, before his face. He heard again the flutter and the passing breath. For a minute afterward he remained there, intent, alone with what he did not understand. He was quite cool. The thing had in it no quality of alarm, only a baffling insistence that,

if comparable at all, was like the demand and refusal of a known face to appear before the mind's eye.

Leonard gave up the riddle, crossed to the shelves again, and slid the good Bishop home for perhaps another century of calm, where the Pelagians cease from troubling. As he did so, the handle of the front door turned.

"Hello, George," he said quietly, over his shoulder. "Glad to see you. Been entertaining more spooks."

The door closed, the bolt was shot.

"Home early, aren't you?"

George did not answer. There was a flapping sound of wet raincoats.

Leonard turned from the books. Two men stood near the door, watching him.

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### XIII

At first glance he took them for strangers. The candle-light falling short of where they stood, left their features in doubt: their quiet appearance had surprised him while his thoughts ran elsewhere; and as for a time they neither spoke nor moved, nothing told him who they were. Then, by the difference in height and bearing, he knew. This was the pair who had talked bad French in the Bottle of Hay.

"Here we are," thought Leonard. "Trouble ahead."

If they meant danger, he welcomed it after so much idleness. The two seemed to be waiting keenly for his next movement. He therefore remained still, outwardly at ease. Their silence and wooden immobility conveyed a threat, but also tickled his sense of melodrama: the taller man, cloaked in dark waterproof, had struck a bit of attitude which recalled the fatal warbler Edgardo at Lucia di Lammermoor's wedding. Next mo-

ment, acting together with military precision, they peeled off their raincoats, dropped them clashing on the floor, and flung down their hats. It was done quickly, in perfect time, and showed rehearsal if not drill. They had stripped at once for business. Leonard perceived that much, and held himself ready; but meanwhile he could think only of a pair of comedians opening some trick on the stage. He smiled, and when the taller man came abruptly forward, received him smiling.

"I didn't hear you knock, gentlemen," said he. "There is a very fine old knocker on my door."

From the corner of his eye, Leonard took note that his other enemy, the swart little man, stood by the door as if posted there on guard. He liked this arrangement: it was a mistake.

"Bar shooting," he thought, "I can handle 'em one after one."

The fellow near by, George's professional traitor and Amalekite, confronted him with a smirk of triumph. He was neatly but stiffly dressed, as when they had met in Gino's café.

"Pardon me, Mr. Corsant," he replied in his throaty bass, and bowed with mock politeness. "On such a dark night, we could not find your knocker. You must excuse. Yes, such a dark, lonesome night!"

Meeting the look in his pale eyes, Leonard understood. Here was a bad egg, a dirty fighter, cold-blooded, yet pompous as a Prussian, touchy in the headpiece, swollen, and quick to explode; moreover, a chap who smirked because two to one against a sick man would be easy. This last consideration hardened our friend's heart. He retreated a few steps, limping badly.

"Now you are here," said he, "won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, no." The pale-eyed fellow overdid his irony. "Our business is quite short; it can be done standing."

Leonard sighed, and leaned against the wall as though faint. He had hoped to draw these two yet farther apart; but though one remained still on guard by his door, the other, instead of following, began to pace up and down across the room, near the portrait of the swordsman.

"It is a very dark night," he repeated, with relish.

"So dark as all that?" drawled his victim. "Please don't say it again. Really, you freeze the marrow in me bones."

Any kind of talk would serve to waste time; the more time wasted, the better chance of George's return. But whether George came or

not, somebody about this room was to have a surprise, whenever poor Mr. Laurence Corsant, leaning here so feeble and nursing his bad leg so plaintively, should get his health back all of a sudden and jump in.

"Don't you try laughing at me, Corsant. I advise you not." The walker by the portrait halted. His face grew red. All the bully in him blustered. "Your ape's pranks at the inn, they were very fonny, hey, but they did not buy you anything."

Leonard made round eyes of alarm.

"Oh, no, of course, not a red," he answered, meekly. "Pure amateur sport."

"Ah, sport, sport! That kind of stoff makes me sick!" The other glared at him. "I advise you not to be fonny. Now come, we have talked enough nonzense. You are trying to waste our time; but it's no use, for that man of yours, the damn gipsy, is down in the village some miles away. There is only one deaf old woman here. You had better give us quick what we are after."

Leonard feigned surprise and ignorance. He was in fact beating his brains: how could he entice this chap to draw nearer, to come across the room within fair striking distance? By showing him any old bit of paper . . .

"Yes? You want something?" he asked.  
"What can it be?"

His adversary blustered again.

"Oh, come! You know well enough, Corsant. Two little sheets of writing. We have called them Gamma and Delta in our game. One you stole from me in that pigsty place, day before yesterday. The other you stole from old Jacob the Beardless, at the Wolf's Well, out there." He swept his arm angrily toward some unknown region of the East. "We want them both. You can keep all the others."

Leonard began groping lazily in his pockets.

"May I? Thank you."

Both men watched him more sharply than ever. He could read in their eyes the certainty that if he had a weapon, he would never draw it but half way. Being unarmed, he took his time, enjoyed their suspense, and very languidly searched pocket after pocket. There was nothing to serve his trick, not so much as an old letter, a card, a scrap. Among crumbs of tobacco, his fingers encountered a wilted leaf,—the fern-tip which that girl in the blue-bell grove had given him for luck. He brought it out and kept it in his left hand, as though the crumpled fragment had really been a talisman. At the moment he needed all such

friendly reminders. George's umbrella, the grandmotherly gamp, stood by him against the wall. He remembered how Gino had leaned in the same dejected fashion. From these thoughts he looked up calmly.

"It's no go," said he. "Sorry, gentlemen, but I've not the faintest idea where your documents are gone to. I haven't them."

The man by the portrait stamped his foot, and suddenly raged.

"Come! No more!" he cried, with a stream of foul language. "Where are they?"

Leonard waited until he had done roaring.

"I don't know. Wouldn't tell you if I did, but I don't."

This was perfectly true. He laughed. The words, or the laugh, or both together, had an amazing effect. Truth prevailed: there came a dead lull of astonishment and belief.

"What's this?" The fellow's harsh voice dropped to a whisper. He cleared his throat, and stared, crouching forward. "What's this? Watch the door, Kamsa! Look sharp. This man—it's not Corsant at all!"

Silence followed. The pair looked from him to each other and back again quickly, moved, stood fast, then hearkened with sidelong glances. Doubt

had them wavering, suspicions of a trap, an ambushade in some corner of the room. It was Kamsa the underling who first took heart again.

"Oh, he's Corsant oll raight," affirmed the swarthy Locust. "No fear. See 'is laig. We had that given 'im at——"

His master turned on him in fury. "Shut up, you chee-chee. Keep your ears open. There's something wrong here."

Leonard agreed with them both.

"Yes, you're seeing things. There are spooks in the room," he said, blandly, and went on wasting time. "I can tell you better in Latin. '*Aliquid latet, quod non patet.*' Spooks would naturally prefer a dead language, wouldn't they? It's good Bull Latin. 'There is a mystery at the bottom.' Or you might say——

'Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim-milk masquerades as cream.'

In short, I have the receipt of fern seed."

The leader of his enemies remained bending forward, glaring at him with no less perplexity than hatred.

"I believe you are. Same silly way of talking. Brainless puppy. Him or his brother. But the front of your head's different."

Leonard smiled in apology.

"You're right. No brains. 'The shallow part is *always* the forehead, at least in Oxford, sir.' " He suddenly cast off his pretended weakness, drew clear of the wall, stood up, and spoke out. These brutes would never come close enough, so let them begin. "Put your mind at rest. I'm Corsant. We've fooled long enough. You, I believe, are a secret agent, and a bad one who can't pull off the simplest job. What any China Coast comprador would call a Number Nine man, on sight. That's you: a professional turn-coat, selling out both ends, and even so a failure. You walk in here threatening me about some of your trumpery blackmail papers not worth the smutty thumb-prints on 'em, and then stand round talking phrenology. Pretty feeble. Now get out, the pair of you. I don't know where your Hittite garbage is, and don't care. It's in safe keeping, for good. You have one minute to pick that wet mess off my floor, and clear yourself and your chee-chee sweeper out of my house. That's all. You needn't stop to beg my pardon. Start, and start now."

The man by the picture, who also had drawn himself upright, took this abuse at first like a wooden image. Then his body began to writhe,

his features to swell, and the breath to sputter and quaver between his teeth.

"Ah! You think we are bloffing!" He raised both fists aloft, brandished them, clapped them to his head like a madman, choked, and suddenly reeling, struck with his elbow the naked sword so that it clattered on the wall. "I show you who is failure!"

He wrenched the sword down, and came leaping across the room. It is probable that even in his frenzy he may have been taken aback when Leonard met him half way, low-set and springy, on guard with George's bag of an umbrella.

As for Leonard, he saw only the furious pale eyes: that was his affair: but he heard Grayland charging from somewhere with a shout, and returned it:

"No, no! Get that little greaser by the door, George!"

Meanwhile there had been three or four passes of the sword. Leonard laughed.

"Crude work, old man.—Poor schooling.—Stiff.—Come again."

It came again, the good Toledo in bad hands. Next moment it went whirling through the air, and fell with a clang. As it did so, Corsant

dropped his umbrella, and struck out right-handed for the jaw.

"There's your Amalekite," he called.

But the man had hardly come down before George was sitting on him, grinning like a black wild-cat.

"Hand me that sword," said George. He was barefoot.

The front door stood half open. From behind it, among the raincoats, a pair of short legs kicked feebly.

"That's nothing. Only sent the black-and-tan to bye-low."

Leonard could not yet understand the scene.

"The door was bolted," he said. "How'd you get in?"

George, sitting as on a fallen horse, grew impatient.

"Crawled underneath their mimosa, o' course, and upstairs. 'Twas Kamsa the Locust drew the bolt. I caught him flitting.—Here!" Grayland shook out one hand, fretfully. "This fellow's coming to. Give me the sword."

Leonard recovered that weapon, but kept it.

"No you don't." He shook his head. "None of that."

"But you've never known this beast," cried

George, angrily. "I do. He's one trail of slime from here to hell-fire. Hand over."

"No, sir. He's the captive of my trusty gamp," said Leonard. "I don't want any of his low gore in my nice clean house."

Another voice behind them joined the argument.

"My own feelings to a T," it said, crisp and cheerful. "You're outvoted, George."

They turned. On the threshold, removing a jaunty brown oilskin, stood young Mr. Laurence.

"Come right in with your men, will you?" He looked back toward the rain, where two or three dark figures waited. "House-breaking, I take it; or assault with a deadly weapon? Good evening, namesake. How are you?"

## XIV

"You were like the last scene in Hamlet," said Mr. Laurence Corsant, when he and Leonard were dining an hour afterward. "Prostrate forms all over the stage. Rather extraordinary to walk in upon, by one's own hearth-stone, wasn't it?" He laughed. "Yet in a way I expected something uncommon. Whenever George grows mysterious, you may be sure he's cooking a little surprise for you."

They sat at a corner of the great table, where two silver trees filled with candles now burned brightly and made the surroundings less forlorn; but even so their excess of elbow-room, the board reaching empty away to its foot, gave them a deserted air as if they remained lingering after company had gone. While his kinsman spoke, this fancy ran strong in Leonard's mind. It was more than fancy, it was truth; for at this lighted table many had sat who were now vanished, and they two alone survived.

"I knew George would be stirring up some *jagra*," continued Laurence. "His devilish wiles for getting me out of this house were rather lame. So I didn't go far or stay long. This afternoon from Mrs. Merle's window (by the way, you've quite cut me out with her), I saw those two rascals go by. Hence all the constabulary with me this evening. I must admit you and George don't require much help."

He smiled, and turned their conversation to the East, both near and far. Had a stranger been at table, seeing them together, he would have found more traits of difference than of likeness in the two men. Both were fair-haired, rather hook-nosed, and in frame slender though well knit; but there resemblance ended between Leonard the sun-burnt hearty eater, quick of tongue, and Laurence with his pale thin face, his leisurely dry speech, his resignation to a narrow diet, and about his eyes the look of one who had lately come through suffering, unbeaten, still merry.

"Yes. That girl in Alexandria," declared the ascetic, "no wonder she thought she knew you. I often chucked her under the chin. Metaphorically, of course. Pert little baggage. Half Greek, half French. From one of the islands."

"Mighty pretty, anyhow," urged Leonard. "Wasn't she?"

His host could not remember that part.

"I dare say. Her father worked for us a long while out there. Useful man, most useful, after you learned to know him and could sift the lies out. A chin-chucking policy helped one learn, you know." Laurence's eyes twinkled at some memory. "But to come back. Our friend whom the police led babbling away just now: he gave you a friendly warning in Gino's café, did he? That's interesting. Can't tell you how interesting. He *would* have wanted me to clear out then. For reasons.—The dickens of it is, I never can tell you just what, or how very, very much you've done for me, old chap."

He said this lightly, his hearer took it so; but each man for an instant looked the other in the eyes, and appeared content with what he saw there.

"Right! Understood," said Laurence. "Some things I can tell you, and shall."

A quiet step sounded in the hall. Grayland, wet and sombre, came to report.

"How now, G. G.?" said his young chief. "What? Your prisoners didn't escape?"

George stood and glowered at the table.

"No fear," he answered, doggedly. "They're in tight enough. But Lord, what's a couple of years for house-breaking?"

Mr. Laurence Corsant gave a little time and study to his retainer.

"My dear George," said he, "do you sulk because you're not in for manslaughter yourself? If so, let not your heart be troubled. That pair will have reason to wish they had never seen us. Their woes are only beginning to-night."

The mourner glanced up quickly.

"If it's a fair question, sir: you mean they'll be taken higher?"

"Much higher." Laurence nodded. "So high as to make Gilderoy's kite seem a titlark, my boy, and Ossa like a wart." He sighed. "Have you that paper you spoke of, the one my namesake—er—obtained at the Bottle of Hay? Not the love letter."

Without a word, Grayland left the room and presently returned. He laid before them the sheet of paper covered with black curves and hooks like shorthand, signed in vermilion with a man's thumb. Laurence read it through rapidly, then dragged a candlestick toward him, and read again with care. His eyes appeared to darken, as if the old pain

which they had conquered once were giving him another twinge.

"All the words and music of the play." He spoke bitterly, and shook his head. "With the charming facts we already had, it completes a very nasty mess. Finish." He lighted a cigarette among the candles, and smoked pensively. "Thanks to your agile doings at the Bottle of Hay, all this rottenness has fallen into the right hands. In the wrong, your paper here and one I held, would have been used to bring on,—well, massacre, followed by another hole-and-corner war that might spread. Certainly a few hundred men, women, and children, perhaps a few thousand, who never heard of you or me, will go on leading so-called innocent lives out there."

The morose cloud swept from George's face. Glowing with admiration, he turned to Leonard.

"See him! Hear him!" he cried. "Don't let him deceive you. It's a pukkah victory, that's what, after hard work. And he makes as if he'd lost his last friend."

Leonard rose, and took one of the candlesticks.

"Your raw material of victory, dear old chap," said he, limping off toward the door, "is never so pretty as the manufactured article. The dyer's hand.—Let's go in by the fire."

Later, upstairs at bed-time, the two Corsants were leaning on the sill of an open window, admiring the night. In dark trees below them pattered a few last drops, but the air smelled fresh, and over the black cloud-like hills and whispering river hung a multitude of stars. Laurence, in pajamas, had come to see if the guest-chamber were comfortable, and then lingered to talk a while.

"Glad you and G. G. hit it off so well throughout," said he. "A great old George. Curious thing, you know. George and I have been in tight corners together; and here's a game leg to remind me how he saved the rest of my carcass; and yet—that seems the least part of it, somehow. We met by chance at Aden, of all places. We've always been more like brothers, if you understand me." The young man became silent, and looked out as though reading the stars. "Peaceful here, isn't it?—As for George, there's something I want to show you. It can wait till morning. By the way, he declares that we must keep your umbrella in the family archives; that our forerunner in the picture, the johnny with the sword, below-stairs, would have been proud of you. Wonderful work, George says: never saw anything half so good."

The speaker turned, and waiting, seemed to expect a reply.

"I did use to fence a bit," said Leonard, with embarrassment. "Dad always believed in getting the best master who'd take you, for learning anything. Forgotten most of it now."

Laurence nodded, smiling like one who approved the words but saw behind them. All he said was:

"Wise man, your governor. Mine, too, had his—Well, it's late." He drew in his head, and rose from the window-sill. "Good night."

After his host had gone, Leonard remained watching the stars. There were indeed certain championships, meetings between masters of broadsword and foil, which his answer had ignored; the late combat, rapier and gamp, had been no boy's play; but what he concealed most carefully, and what his thoughts now dwelt on, was even a less important fact. All through that engagement he had kept, in his left hand, a dog's-eared corner of fern leaf.

"By gum, you may say it *was* lucky." He nursed with one finger a raw line that smarted under his ear. "The beggar's blade missed my throat by an inch."

The stars were many and bright, all things un-

der them a blackness varied only with hints of form. Leonard could hear the river like a faint breeze passing down the valley. Somewhere below, the night hid a grove of beeches, round which the *Rose* had gone, and toward which he continued looking. Outwardly he saw nothing; inwardly he saw red oar-blades flash between sun and water, and a girl whose dark eyes befriended him as she rowed away.

"A pity." He turned from the window to bed. "A pity she won't ever know her charm worked."

Bright sunlight, next morning, shone upon a world refreshed and wonderfully green, clear overhead, with vernal haze melting in the distance roundabout. It was lazy weather; and as two lazy young men with golf clubs passed through the garden, they halted to enjoy it all,—from the sleepy noise of rooks half a mile away, to a pleasant click of shears close by, and a smell of box that mingled with their own first tobacco after breakfast.

"Enough to make one poetical. 'The earliest pipe of half-awakened bards,' eh?" Laurence mused, and snuffed the air. "A general Pukwana of the peace-pipe."

The clipping ceased; from behind an overgrown tangle rose George; his wet shears were spattered

with crumbs of green, which he wiped off as he said good morning.

"The man's got his mare again." He viewed these idlers with radiant satisfaction. "Each back in his own coat, and all's well. Good Lord, it's a treat to see a couple of you round!"

"Come along with us, George."

The bedraggled gardener shook his head.

"Not I. Nobody's trimmed this mess proper for twenty years." He bent down, out of sight. "'Tis a ruin."

"By the way, coats: you remind me." Laurence turned to his companion. "I've an apology for some bad temper, when we met under the bridge. Too long a story now. I'll tell it to you some day."

George suddenly rose again from the leaves. His black eyes were sparkling oddly.

"Could I be there to hear it?" he begged. "I've a reason for asking."

"Of course. To-night, say."

Nodding to himself, Grayland once more disappeared.

"Thank you." By his voice, he seemed content. "Some tales need more than one man to tell 'em."

They left him clipping peacefully behind his tangle, and wandered off to their game. It was

a silent but a cheerful round that they played, over miles of clean-washed turf and daisies newly opened, with greens heavy and cups brimful of water. Though lame, slow, and unpractised, Laurence won hole after hole. His adversary took a thorough beating, administered happily in sunshine to the tune of skylarks. At noon they went down the beach and swam in surf, then lying on the yellow sand ate bread and butter, dozed and grew sunburnt, watched the gulls hover about the peak of the Devil's Nose, or with thoughts drawn past the horizon by smoke from an unseen ship, bartered yarns of outlandish adventure. By sunset they returned home, now through long-shadowed fields, now along some back yard wall over which came grunting and the hot, sour smell of pigs, now in green lanes dazzled with gold.

It was after dinner, by candlelight, that Laurence repeated his words of yesterday evening.

"About George, now. Here's the thing I had to show you. Found it stuck away in a dust-hole."

He handed to Leonard a miniature, rimmed with gilt, and set in a square green velvet frame or plaque. The face was that of a young Victorian dandy, high-colored, handsome, but with

his curly black hair somewhat too romantic, and his look too dashing.

"Why it's George!" cried the visitor. "No. Can't be.—George playing the fool in fancy dress?" Laurence wore a quizzical smile.

"George without the brains. Just so," he agreed, "Curious, don't you think?—for that was my father's brother, really. His elder brother. The family runs fair and black by starts. He was black, you see; died young, cut off in the flower of his wild oats; fell from a horse. They say 'between the stirrup and the ground,' but one has uncharitable doubts. Not quick enough to seek pardon, that head."

"Strange," said Leonard. "The swordsman's portrait, too. Both so like George masquerading."

He gave back the miniature. Laurence placed it on the mantel.

"This poor relic's been long enough in disgrace. I left home too young to know. But our fine gentleman threw himself about a bit, I fancy.—Yes: George——"

Their conference ended abruptly.

"Did you call?"

They turned with a guilty air. George had been coming downstairs, and paused, with his head in the shadows of the pointed arch.

## XV.

"JUST wondering where you'd gone," said Laurence, promptly. "Don't be so damned active. Come dawdle with us, G. G."

For a time after George had obeyed, and sunk his long body into a chair between them, silence followed. The night was warm as summer. Through open windows drifted air fragrant with the balm of all the country, its passage unfelt, unknown but for tremors in the candle-shine and weaving departure of smoke from three tobacco-pipes. There was no fire; but the men sat ranged, as by habit, facing the andirons and the black chimney-mouth.

"Well, brethren," Laurence broke out, of a sudden, "the spirit moves me. I promised you should hear an apology."

He sank back, crossed his lame leg carefully over the other, and again became silent.

"By Jove," he said at last, in a wondering tone, "no one else ever heard it before! Not all.

I'd forgotten that. The story of a bad boy. Poor little devil, off in the past, he seems another person. This be none of I, but once upon a time he was.

"My governor sent me to our usual school, a good enough one, not so very far from here, as you know. I was a very shy, bookish lad, the last you'd expect to find making trouble. Never can tell. One fine spring day, much like the present weather, behold this child dreaming along out of bounds,—not wilfully, mark you, just dreaming with his head full of King Arthur, or Leatherstocking, or Grettir the Strong. All at once I came upon an old woman sitting by a little fire under some thorns. I see her now as a dirty and rather silly old creature; but at the moment she seemed all that a child pictures of what a witch ought to be,—elf-locks, and wild eyes, and skinny fingers. You know. She had a stone jug on the grass beside her, with a tin cup tied to its ear. The black-thorn, or may-tree—I forget which, but it was covered with the dead bodies of young birds, field mice, beetles, humble-bees, and such, all impaled on thorns, and every mouse pecked on the head, bloody. It must have been the shambles of a butcher bird, a shrike. But to me it seemed the devil's Christmas tree. The old wom-

an sat under it mumbling, with smoke in her crazy eyes, and these murdered things withering round her like a—like a bad halo. As if she were wasting her enemies away with magic. She had a dead beetle hanging in her hair. I knew she was a witch. Jove, she was. The boy guessed right. So far as one or two men's lives went afterward, she was a Norn."

George removed his pipe from his mouth.

"When you caught her," he said, "she'd begun stuffing hen's feathers into a paper bag with a hole in it."

"How did you know that?" Laurence came bolt upright, bringing his feet to the floor with a thump. "Good heavens, man! Do I talk in my sleep? Or have you second sight? How did you know?"

He leaned forward, staring.

"It was revealed to me in a dream," George answered, bitterly. "Go on."

But the narrative had met a check. Laurence eyed his neighbor with astonishment and doubt. When he spoke again, his manner seemed less free.

"Why, there's not much more," he declared. "The old woman blandished a good deal, told some long rigmaroles, uncorked her jug, and

filled the tin cup for me, most lovingly. Don't know how you guessed those feathers, George, but you're right. She was cooking a hen in a ball of clay. We talked, and watched the process, and I emptied her cup as often as you please. She told me it was ginger-pop."

George nodded mournfully.

"Ay," said he. "A hot day and a thirsty school-boy."

"Right again. It was very hot," declared Laurence. "The boy turned up at school blear-eyed and staggering, drunk as a hatter. The rule was public flogging and expulsion. I couldn't explain. I took it."

He paused, and looked slowly about the room.

"My poor old governor had things out with me right where we're sitting," he continued. "You may imagine, a strict father with what was to have been our fine young Oxford scholar, parson, and so on. I couldn't explain to him, either: too young, and—and bewildered. His face was like the dead. Most of that boy died here, too. The rest of him ran away and took more whippings from the world. Twenty odd years of them. Ever since I came home last week, I've seen his ghost haunting those books."

The speaker got on foot, lighted his pipe, and stood glancing down at Leonard.

"Now you understand," he added, "why I went off at score when we first ran across each other, and you mentioned old women with mead by the wayside."

George, polishing briar with the ball of his thumb, spoke as though to himself.

"She always laced that mead something chronic. Three parts brandy. Mr. Leonard knows, or ought to. It was the same old woman and the same old mead." He looked up at Laurence, his eyes burning with a sombre fire. "You need more than one man for some stories. Too young and bewildered, rot! Your boy took disgrace, let his life be spoilt, to keep his word with a foolish old body who'd been stealing hens and trespassing. You promised not to tell you'd seen her. You never did. The boy's heart may have broke in this room, but not his word."

Again Laurence remained staring in wonder.

"How on earth!" he exclaimed.

"She's my grandmother," said George. "Yes, old Becky, at the Ring of Bells now. 'Twas grandson's earnings put her there."

A moth was fluttering among the candles. George rose, caught it with one sweep of his

brown hand, and passing to the river windows, threw it out into starlight. He returned and sat down.

"When I spoke of her," began Laurence. He paused. "If anything was said to hurt you, I—well, I'm sorry."

"You said no more than plain truth," George growled. With elbows on knees, he studied the floor. "She was what God made her. And some help from mankind. What's past is done with, and can't be recalled. Except onions, they say. At any rate speak you did, so I'd better keep on. Amongst the wreckage of her old brain——" Grayland reached out to place his pipe on the table, then hung his head over his clasped hands. "Well, she had secrets. Back in my childhood she used to prophesy: when a man should come from abroad and pass through the Devil's Nose against the sun, why, enemies will be overthrown, and things made clear, and good fortune, and so on. Moonshine. But the first part's come true. So here goes."

George struck fist into palm lightly between his knees, blow after blow, as if hammering at a thought. His bowed figure seemed overcome by sadness.

"I was lying under the shrike's thorn," he said,

"behind it, that day of your undoing. No farther than from here to the andirons. Had I known what your name was, likely I'd have tried to kill you. When I did know it, years afterward, I'd learned what your word was worth; what it cost you. Never been able to pay that back, but I've tried faithful.

"This is all in the family." He looked up with a grave smile, which had gone as he bent his head once more. "It may hurt you. It hurts me now.

"That other boy behind the thorn was older than you. His troubles begun earlier. He'd run the hedges a long time, a whole life of it, begging, cheating, after selling colored whirligigs or paper flowers as a babe. People would ask you where you lived, meaning kind no doubt. I'd look up at 'em like a wild beast, and say nothing, or else run. I was. A little wild beast, afraid all day, awake half the night, hunger pains clawing in my belly. The only thing I had to be fond of was my mother."

George stopped. He took his head in his hands.

"Maybe those feelings come stronger when you're a little wild beast. Maybe not. I don't know. But she was my shadow of a rock in a weary land. It ended one night before dark, one

misty night. We were to lie in a barn, not a decent barn like Dr. Wolcot's that he let Dick Stanley sleep in, as they tell, but an old roost where trampers had made all filthy, a habitation for Zim and Jim and every unclean thing. I was five or six years old. She'd spoken strange to me that evening—so fond and terrible deep and changeable, I cried in her arms; then sent me off on a long errand that came to naught, foolish like.

"I got back through the roke, and went indoors tired and hungry. It was dark in there. My mother was standing in the midst alone, her back toward me. I spoke to her about the errand being no good. She never answered or moved, so I went closer and spoke again. She seemed not to hear me. That wasn't like her, and she stood unusual tall in the dark, with her head as if listening. I touched her. Last of all I put up my hand and pulled at her skirt, like a child's way of doing. Then my mother turned. There was light enough to see her face looking down at me, and I wish there hadn't been."

George moved his hands from his temples to his forehead.

"She turned, and she kept on turning right

past me. And then I saw that her feet didn't touch the floor."

He remained still for a moment; suddenly uncovered his face by dropping his hands and clasping them before him; but regarded neither of his companions.

"That," said he, "is what came of our fine gentleman who threw himself about a bit.—I couldn't help overhearing you. Penalty for quick ears."

With another sudden movement, George left his chair and drew himself erect; still caring to see nobody, he turned, stepped to the window from which he had thrown the moth, and leaned there. Past his head smoke drifted into the warm, sweet-smelling darkness. Across their empty fireplace the two younger men exchanged looks, without a word, but asking each other what was to be said or done.

It was Laurence who found an answer. He went limping to the table, and with unnecessary pains, very slowly, mixed three great night-cap drinks. He made them strong and dark, holding up each tumbler for prolonged inspection, contriving a good deal of clink and rattle. Afterward he stood quite still and let more time go by.

"We're waiting for you, George," he called at last, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Here you are."

Grayland came back to them, quiet and composed.

"I always knew it must be something more than friendship." Laurence held out a tumbler in each hand, and when these two were taken, raised the third before him. "Cousin Leonard, and Cousin George, I wish we were to be longer under this roof. Here, let's all stand on the hearth-stone.—That's better. How many years, do you suppose, have gone by since three of us did this together?"

With his glass, he beckoned for them to touch brims. His air was at once offhand and ceremonial.

"Come, all the family. Here's luck."

## XVI

DURING the next few days, the three men went about together as if inseparable. The fine weather continued. They shared their enjoyment of it, meeting early by tacit consent, taking long rambles, bathing in the river, rowing the *Daisy* down for a plunge in the surf, or up for a picnic on some tranquil reach where nest-guarding swans with fiery eyes pursued their wake and hissed at them; and coming home by sunset to talks that ended only with late bed-time.

"Well," sighed Leonard one evening, "tomorrow I must go. Really must, this time."

His friends both turned gloomy.

"Why, man, you've just come," retorted Laurence. "Is it growing so dull for you?"

"No. I should think not," declared the visitor. "'But Scripture says an ending to all fine things must be.'"

"I don't care a button what Scripture says." The master of the house grew peevish. "You're

not treating George and me in a high-class way at all. You're only being polite. Now you drop it. In *Deportment For Dukes* it is clearly stated: 'At a Hint from the Hostess, the Departure occurs.' Then and not till then. So you wait; and you'll wait a devilish long time, my boy.—That reminds me. To-morrow my sister's coming back. You can't run away."

From behind him, George, towering in the background, shot a volley of most fiendish leers. They gave all warnings that a human face could convey, against vinegar ladies who bit heads off.

"If I should let you go now," continued Laurence, "why, Rose would make the rest of my life perfectly unbearable. You can stay, can't you? Good!—I've hardly seen her twice in years myself, till the other day. Brought up by some of her father's old friends, 'of the tribe of Dan and *noli me tangere*.' Time to see what frills they have put into her head."

Thus it happened that on the following afternoon, upstairs, Leonard heard a crunch of wheels that stopped by the front door, and women's voices below. He felt little or no curiosity toward this Miss Corsant who set her cousin George's teeth so on edge: no doubt she had come to spoil their harmony in bachelors' hall: but perhaps for the

advantage of seeing the enemy first, he went to a window and looked out.

The impulse had come too late. George was bobbing away down the sunlit drive, in a basket phaeton drawn by an old white pony, the same that he had taken to Peacock for shoeing and led into the surf. Whatever passengers Grayland had brought were now indoors.

"All right," thought the young man. "Let her snap."

From the stairhead came a rustle of skirts. He turned. A very neat lady's maid, with gray hair and a sensible, cheerful face, passed by into a corridor as if she had always been passing, knew her way, and liked it.

"That woman's head never was bitten off," he considered, as he went down. "George's bugbear can't be so frightful."

Coming through the arch, round a corner, he suddenly had his advantage after all, and saw the enemy first. Under the portrait of the young horseman, and the blades, a girl sat leaning backward, her hands folded in her lap, resting, as if alone with some thought which was good but rather grave company. Her face, clear brown tinged with delicate red, might have been that of a sister to the horseman, but lacked his im-

patience; her dark eyes were George's without the guile. So much Leonard saw before discovering to his great surprise and even greater delight, that she was the girl of the blue-bell grove who had sat with him in the rain.

The sound of his footsteps roused her. She turned, saw him, and leaving her chair, came forward.

"How do you do? I am Laurence's sister Rose." As they met she added, in a very pretty confusion: "Thank you for your oilskin. I have brought it, but should have sent it before . . ."

"And thank you for the receipt of fern seed," he broke in. "Your charm worked. If you remember it, under your namesake the boat?"

Her confusion deepened, and with it her color.

"Have you forgiven me for teasing you?" she asked. "I'm still ashamed. But it was fun."

That downward laughter not quite controlled came and went in her eyes. He liked it better than ever; still better when it got the mastery and looked up at him direct.

"I shall kill George," said he.

"Why?"

"Oh—for things he said; and things he didn't say."

"What things? Tell me both kinds." She

read his face. "About me?—Dear old George. He's like a father and a brother and a naughty boy to take care of, all by turns and at once."

Somehow they fell not only into talk but into step together, walking up and down the long room as if they had met for that purpose, or it had been their custom. They went slowly, but found much to say in haste. While they did so, Leonard became haunted with a sense that the old house had come to life: this girl Rose Corsant wore plain, quiet gray, yet while she turned and returned beside him, he could have thought her passage made a shining along the time-blackened oak, and cast light rather than shadow. Far from being spoiled, the place had got what it always wanted.

Once or twice Rose came to a halt, and looked about her, gravely, as she had looked when sitting under the picture.

"I can't bear to think," she said, "that Laurence will have to sell this. Poor boy, it makes rather a sad home-coming." She started on again. "What a pity!—But we must enjoy it all we can while we may."

Leonard often recalled this saying of hers; for afterward, as days passed and household acquaintance grew, he was with her constantly under

one roof or outdoors, and never again saw her dispirited. Rose followed her own precept admirably.

"Hanged if I know how we got on without her," grumbled George one evening. "Worth a dozen of us. Hear her."

The men surrounded their hearth as usual by candle-light. She was moving somewhere above, humming, with little outbreaks of clear melody:

"There were three gipsies a'come to my door,  
And downstairs ran this a-lady oh!  
One sang high, and the other sang low,  
And the other sang bonny, bonny Biscay, O!"

George hearkened, his brown face lifted somewhat toward the sound. It was no secret that he worshipped her. He had tried at first to hold aloof; but her brother would have none of that, and had kept him in the circle.

"Then she pulled off her silk-finished gown . . ."

The singer, in white, came running down through the arch, floating like a feather on air and gay as the lady of her ballad.

"To this day you've not told me how the fight went." Her eyes were black stars. In her hand

was George's bloated umbrella, which gave an effect of Beauty and the Beast. "You are all too lazy to show me."

A moment later she had them dispersed about the room, three grown men playing like children. George shrank into himself by the door, enacted Kamsa the Locust hideously—a long-legged chimæra trying to be fat—and croaked their stage directions. Laurence caught down the naked sword. Leonard received her umbrella with a bow, performed the grand salute, and bounced on guard like a rubber ball. They turned the story of that combat into a romp that left all four of them laughing.

As they came to order, Leonard suddenly raised his hand.

"Wait!" He warned them. "It's here again."

They listened. From the corner behind him came a sigh and a flutter, a movement of something without body or name.

"The family spectre," said Laurence. "I've heard it two or three times. Dust falling behind the wainscot, probably. I'm afraid it means dry-rot in these old timbers."

Rose disagreed.

"No, a real ghost," she said. "Not yet laid. Hark!"

The stir had passed, however, and did not come again. They presently forgot it. Rose had other questions in mind. She stood on tiptoe, examining the carven lump of the Devil's Nostrils.

"How elvish this old block of wood can look at night." She appealed to Leonard. "Doesn't it creep and crawl?—By the way, how did you come to think of swimming through the rock? That morning you met George?"

"My father," explained the young man, "always said we must do it, one day. An old story between us. He couldn't just remember what, and I never knew. Something. We were to go through the rock a certain fashion."

George, watching them paternally, growled the single word:

"Withershins."

"What does that mean?" asked Rose. "You read it in witchcraft."

Leonard turned toward the carving and reached up.

"I swam out like this, you see." He put his forefinger into the left nostril. "Why! They're real holes. Deep. Clear through. Thought it was only scooped.—I swam out here." He crooked his finger round behind toward the other

nostril. "And swam in again here, this second hole. Can't quite poke it."

George corrected him.

"Wrong way. That's how you pass a bottle."

Leonard blew dust from his finger, and nodded.

"This way, then." He tried the right nostril. "Hallo!" said he in dismay, and withdrew his hand. "I've broken something."

They all heard a rusty creak, then saw the oaken septum between the nostrils drop forward and stand out from the wall like a peg. There followed a groan or long-drawn shuddering gulp as from old bellows.

Leonard stood like a truant caught in mischief; Rose and her brother came to him quickly; but it was George who first acted upon the fact, and brought one of the candlesticks. His face remained impassive, but his eyes glittered.

"Let her," he said, pointing. "The youngest, for luck. And the lady."

They saw what he meant. The panel under the carving had sprung back, sunken half an inch or so between its neighbors. George, with the flat of his hand, pressed it farther inward.

"Now try."

A crack had appeared. Rose, rather timidly, put her slender brown finger-tips into this, and

gave a sidelong push. The smooth oak glided away to the right, disappeared; a thin cloud of dust flew out in her face; before them stood a shallow recess backed with greenish tatters of mildewed leather and tails of curled hair.

"Padded so as not to give hollow," said George. "Here's your ghost: any draught would set those rags chafing." He spoke eagerly. "Try the gob of verdigris. Below, to your hand. Must be a brass door catch. Try it."

Rose, her black eyes sparkling like his own, obeyed him. The padded leather swung inward on squealing hinges, and left open into darkness a narrow doorway from which two or three stone steps led downward.

"Bowels of the earth," declared George. "Let me test the air.—Some rumor of this crept into grandmother's feeble old brain, I dare say."

He slipped through the opening shoulder-first, crouched and went down, holding the branched candles knee-high before him.

"They burn sweet." His voice rang in some empty confinement. "All right. Come along, but mind your heads."

They trooped down after him, into a room nine or ten feet square, a cell with roof, walls, and floor of solid stone. Dust lay thick on the floor,

in the centre of which, by a table also covered with dust, were two narrow high-backed old chairs, one upright, one overthrown.

"Under the garden rock that a piece of the house juts into, we are." George's head brushed the ceiling as he moved about, explored all corners, and came back to set his candles on the dusty board. "Clever conniving. Naught but the one door, though must be tirly-whirly holes to keep the air so fresh."

The strangeness of this hidden room no more touched him than if he had walked into a shop or a kitchen. But Rose, her brother, and Leonard saw one another somewhat daunted, and required time to be themselves again. On the table stood a platter with clots and crumbling bones in it under the powder of years, two plates, two goblets, all these black as lead; a pair of pistols and a sword gone to rust; a brown feather which, as Rose lifted it, shed its color and became a goose-quill pen; a small ink-horn, and the rags of what had been a man's hat. Laurence took up one of the black goblets, mechanically, with a dreaming air, and set it down. By chance it struck a black plate, and the intruders were surprised when they heard these dead utensils give out a living chink of silver.

"What do you make of it, George?" asked Laurence.

"Two men never eat their breakfast," replied Grayland promptly. "War time, it's like. They cleared out so quick, one of them upset his chair. I'll bet you"—he turned to Leonard—"your great something dad galloped off without hat or weapons down to his ship. Westward ho for your life. O' course that's only my guess. Maybe he went back to war."

Leonard gave a nod.

"Maybe so," he agreed. "It would bear out a yarn father used to tell."

Laurence, dreaming still or thinking, did not seem to hear. He raised the black platter which by-gone men had left full of bones and powder.

"Why," said he, "here's what they were writing with your quill, Rose."

Where the dish left its mark, an oval of polished wood drawn with exact edge amid the dust, lay a folded sheet of manuscript fresh and white as though tucked underneath yesterday. Laurence took this and carefully opened it.

"Wait a minute," called George.

He skipped upstairs into the house, dropped down again with hearth-broom, put the fallen chair on its legs, and brushed both seats clean.

"There you are."

Brother and sister took their places at table.

"Seventeenth century hand, I think," said Laurence, and began to read aloud:

"I, Leonard Corsant, being in the twenty-eighth year of my age, and but newly returned from this damnable slaughter of our kindred, and friends upon both sides whom I saw fallen, as chiefly amongst them at Chalgrove field John Hampden receiving his death by the shattering his hand by the burst of his new pistol . . ."

The reader looked up.

"That's of interest," he remarked, "for Clarendon says he got hit by a brace of slugs in the shoulder.—George is right. It was war time, and your great something grandfather telling his troubles. He flounders a little with the pen.

"and being myself wounded, in my concealment do intend this memorial . . ."

Again Laurence paused.

"And that's all," he said. "Far as the old chap ever carried with his participial history. Rough sketch, perhaps. A deal scratched out, and then lines ruled across the page.—Eh? What comes here below?"

He read no more aloud, but scanned the bottom of the sheet.

"Here's an agreement, drawn up on this table, I fancy, between the same writer and his younger brother Laurence. The wheel of time?"

Rose pushed back her chair and stood up, beckoning Leonard with a smile.

"You sit with him," she said. "It's more fitting, you and he, after those two. Don't you think?"

She obliged him to take her place, where dust had fallen, moth corrupted, and steel decayed, since two men of their name had faced each other so.

Laurence read on to himself.

"I'm no lawyer," he proclaimed suddenly. "But this would seem to promise fair material for a pretty suit. Worth looking into. It's a plain contract. Your forefather who went back to war without his hat or breakfast, owned this house and land. Mine, the younger, stayed at home to hold it, 'by policy and such devices as he may in honor'—those are their words—till the storm blew past. May be valueless now. All the same, by right you should keep this." He handed it across. "They drew their terms up in a rush, on waste paper from a memoir that never got writ-

ten. But it's clear, signed by Leonard and Laurence Corsant, witnessed by one Rich. Hooper and one Gabriel Grayland.—Always one of you handy round the house, George."

The paper, though spotted by damp, felt almost new in Leonard's hands. He looked upon it not without emotion.

"Which is the part," he asked, "that you think—er—pertains to me?"

Laurence leaned over the black dishes, and pointed.

"There. At the foot. Beginning—'For the guidance of our children, to preserve'—and so on."

Leonard, taking his turn, read to the bottom of the page with care.

"They were long-headed, but fond of each other." He glanced from his table companion to George and Rose. "This reminds me of what Mr. Tony Weller said about his wife's will. As it's all right and satisfactory, and we're the only parties interested, we may as well put this bit comfortably——"

He thrust the end of it into the candles. It flared.

"You madman!" cried Laurence, and snatched

the blazing sheet from him. "What right had you?"

Half the paper was burnt away, the offending lower half.

"You saved enough for a relic," said Leonard calmly. "To keep with George's umbrella in the archives. My name's not Tichbourne, you know. I'm just the American cousin. It was nothing but an old scribble, outlawed years ago."

## XVII

ONE evening a week later, George was busy outside the front door. An upstart young elm, pushing its own affair in the absence of mankind, had spoiled a flower bed and darkened a dining-room window. George had felled it, dragged it bodily by main strength into the driveway, and now bent down to lop the branches. He was working at great speed, finishing his job before the dusk thickened into darkness. Barn-swallows darted over the garden leaves, and slewed off in frightened zigzags at every blow of his axe.

Leonard stood near him, talking with lowered voice. It seemed natural for the pair of them to conspire again.

"He mustn't sell this." The younger man's gaze roved from house to garden. "It's a crime."

George nodded, and kicked away a bough.

"Can't be helped." He spoke sadly. "I'd hate to see her go, his sister. But Laurence—Oh,

well, let's cheat ourselves by thinking he'd never stand the climate. In winter there's only two places in England fit for a man to be—in bed, or on the back of a good horse. Leave it at that, for comfort. Pretend he was ordered south."

Leonard remained thoughtful and silent.

"Laurence would never accept it from me," he blurted. "But if you bought the place and gave it back to him, George——"

Grayland looked up swiftly.

"Where'd I get the money?" he retorted. "Like a shot I would. But he and I are a pair of rolling stones. Where would it come from?"

He went on lopping. The muscles in his hard brown forearms played like rods. His axe, the same that once had a purple stain on its edge, weighed some four pounds, but he swung it in one hand like a hatchet, and cut off a limb clean at each blow.

In two words Leonard unfolded a project that had kept him awake nights.

"From me."

George pierced him with a straight glance to ask if he were trying some bad joke.

"No, I mean it." Leonard's face grew red, his tongue slipped and stammered. "You know,

George—the truth is—you know, I'm richer than sin. Rich as a Parsee. Rich as a Bagdad Jew. —I'll be gone, you see. Not a soul would know."

Grayland, poising his axe, accepted this truth at once, calmly.

"You never acted purse-proud."

"Don't know about that. Dad always told me not to spend much on myself," said Leonard.

"Wish you'd known my father, George. You make me think of him so often.—You couldn't help wanting to try to do whatever father told you."

The workman straightened himself, knee-deep among leaves. He smiled, and answered with a kind of envy.

"The boy's not dead in you by a long chalk. You're young in the world." Suddenly he raised his voice. "No. Don't agree with you. The axe is a pretty tool in good hands, but the broad-axe beats it for cleverness, and the adze calls out genius. Now I remember an old shipwright——"

Leonard, staring at this vagary, heard next moment what George's ears had caught a long way off. It was the footsteps of Rose Corsant. She came out at the front door.

"What are you two plotting now?" She called,

and passed on toward the corner rock. "Mischievous?"

They watched her moving away lightly through the green dusk, humming:

"O, what care I for my wedded lord,  
What care I for my money, O?"

When she disappeared behind shrubbery, Grayland laughed.

"Hear that? A reckless tribe you are. My kind do come handy about this house. Could you trust me proxy with such a pot? I stole before you was born, dear lad. I might shoot the moon, or hold fast to what I collared."

Leonard smiled in his turn.

"We'll risk that."

"Right ho. We'll risk it." Grayland bent once more, and chopped. "Now run play. Your Uncle George is busy, and the daylight's nigh gone." For an instant he rose, fondling his axe and grinning in the dusk. "Only, there's a condition. No mortal hand but mine shall ring those bells at your wedding. I'm the boy to make old Gabriel sing tenor."

Leonard, who had begun moving away, stopped and regarded him with horror.

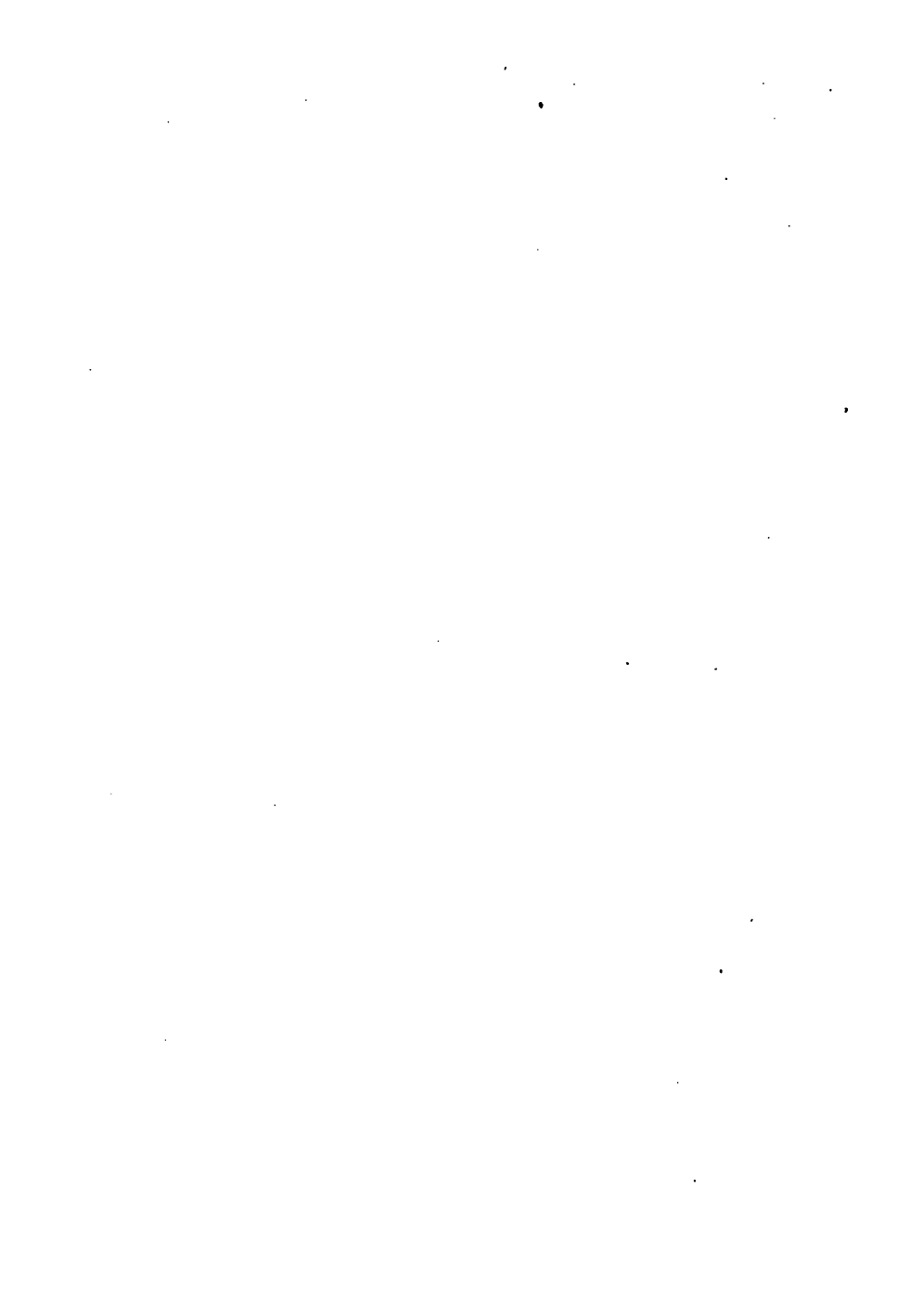
"What! What's this, man alive?"

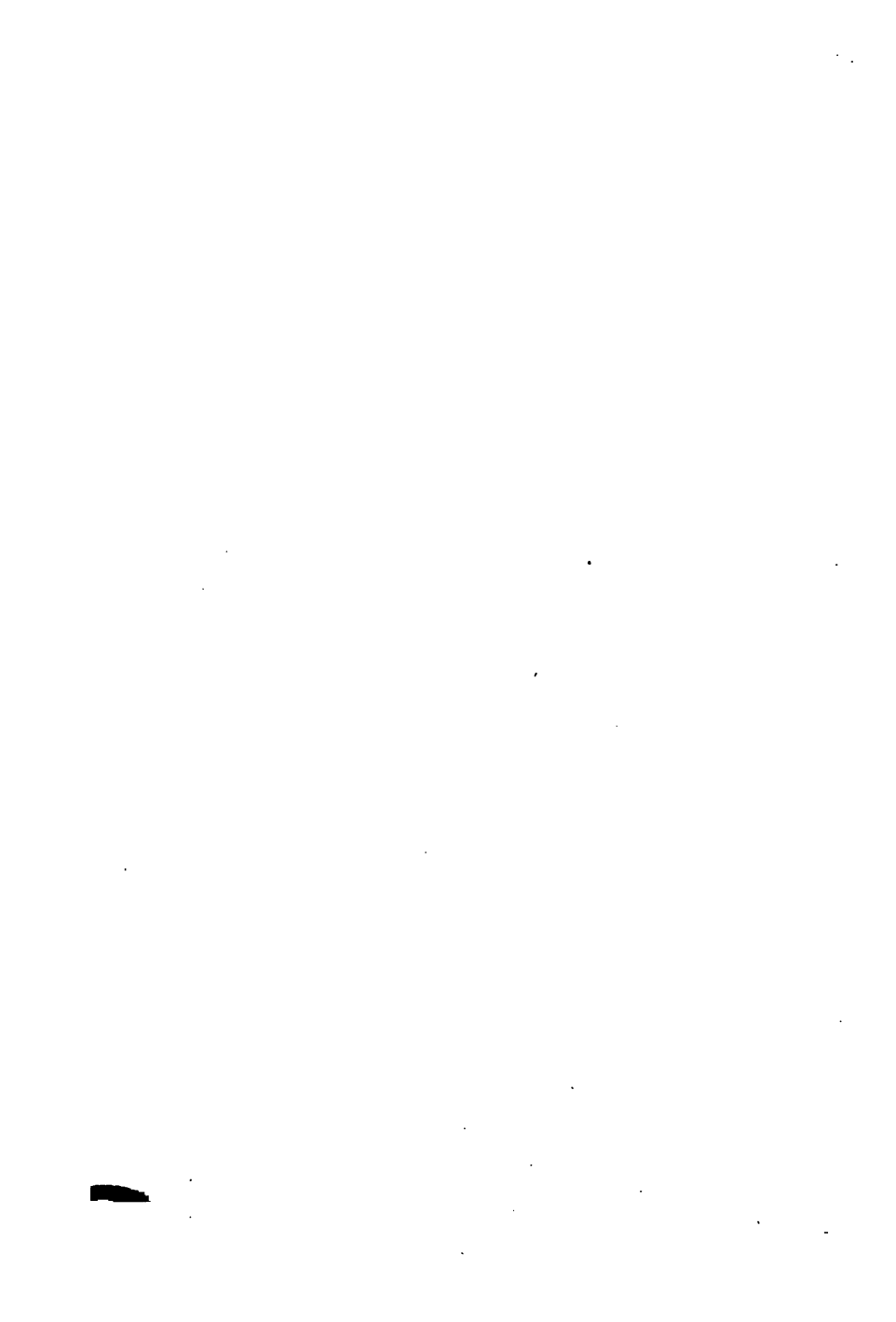
The man alive shot him, cornerwise, one of those black arrows of wickedness.

"Don't forget, when time comes," said George.  
"It was revealed to me in a dream."

THE END









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[illegible]

